

# LutheranWoman

July/August 2008

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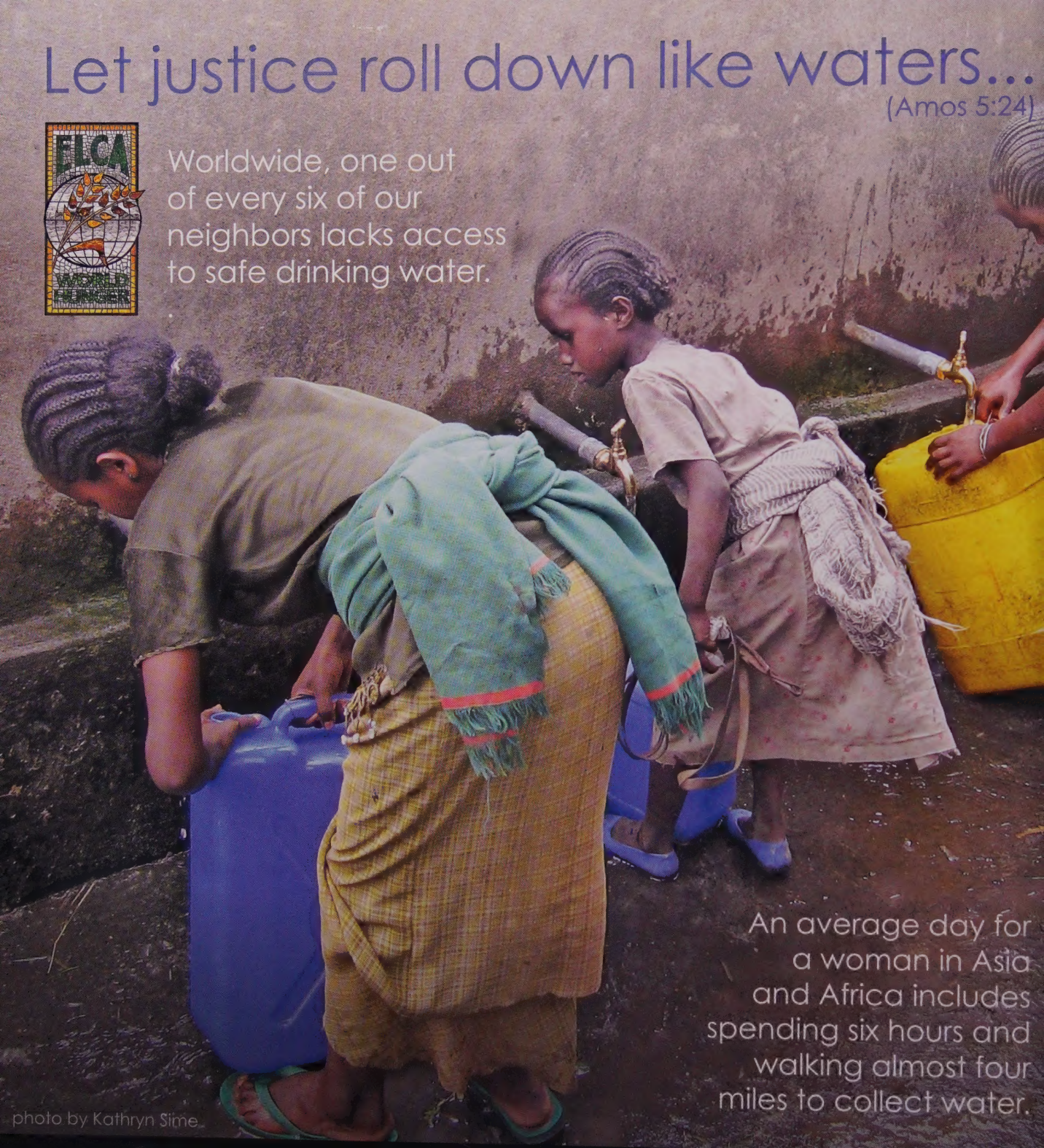


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(Amos 5:24)



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**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.



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## COME TO THE WATERS

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VOICES

## Sinking and Swimming

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

Once when I was in college, I went with one of my friends to stay at her parents' cottage on a lake in Michigan. It was late in the year for swimming, and it was late in the afternoon when we got in the water. As the sun went down, we realized we were getting cold, really cold. I jumped off the raft we were floating on, intending to swim back to shore.

I didn't realize how far out we had drifted, how deep the water was, and how hard it is to swim when you're freezing—and I began to struggle. It did not take long for me to get tired from the effort and the shivering.

I probably would have drowned, but my friend's brother saw that I was in trouble and dived in to pull me to shore. (I hope my mother doesn't read this.) It was a long time ago, but I still remember the feeling of panic as I tried to keep my head above water.

When I reflect on baptism, that experience comes back to me: the feeling of being cold and exhausted and in danger, and then realizing that someone has jumped in to help. The chilling nearness of death and the unexpected rescue and then safety and life again—that is how I now think of the drama of baptism.

In this issue, Bible study author Karen Bockelman writes about how baptism is a matter of death and life: "If, in baptism, we have been united with Christ, then the worst is over. Death has no more power over us; we need not fear it, because we have

already died. And if we have been united with Christ in a death like his, as Paul says, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

That death-and-life matter informs our entire lives as Christians. In "Promises, Promises," E. Louise Williams writes that "Baptism happens only once, but the dying and rising happen again and again." She reminds us that baptism is not a solitary experience: "It's not just between individuals and God. Baptism sets us always in the midst of the people of God, the body of Christ, the church."

Where does our new life in baptism lead us? Deaconess Diane Marten says it calls us to a life of service. No matter how it is lived out, service is our vocation. Sister Diane tells of how the deaconesses washed feet at the last Youth Gathering. They will be at the Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering in Salt Lake City this summer, doing the same humble, joy-filled work.

Finally, we hear from two women who have given the readers of this magazine an important service: the Rev. Gwen Sayler and the Rev. Ann Fritschel, the authors of the new Bible study beginning in September. The fruit of their faithful scholarship, research and writing will bless us for the next months. To learn more about them and the study, see "The Hidden Hand of God: A Conversation" on page 18 and "Bible Study Overview" on page 14. ✿

**Kate Sprutta Elliott** is editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*. You may write her at [LWT@elca.org](mailto:LWT@elca.org).



GIVE US THIS DAY

## Blessed Names

by Marj Leegard

**Do you remember when** you learned to print your name? That was quite an accomplishment. How lucky were those whose names were *Lee* or *Tom*. They learned quickly and soon advanced to writing their names on the sidewalks with multi-colored chalk. We *Marjories* and *Geraldines* looked on in silent admiration, burdened by our mothers' generosity with vowels and consonants.

But, oh, the joy of giving a newborn baby a name. We considered the names of all the grandmothers, the aunts, and the uncles, and mourned that our cousins had already taken all the choicest family names. We tried out all the *Donna Junes* and *Merry Mays* and decided to go with something simple.

After that was decided, then we had a thousand important things to decide about the great day itself. Shall we serve potato salad or hash browns with lots of good stuff added? Shall we have cake or pie or some scrumptious dessert? And then there was the matter of who would be the godparents. We had to make the request and wait for the reply.

And what of the ones who were asked? They had to quickly check the closet to see what they could wear to the baptism. I remember telling my sister that I was down to a navy blue dress and bright green shoes. My sister said that could be a very smart combination, but I was convinced that if it was, it certainly wasn't at the top of the list. Then we had to go to the bank and get a crisp new five-dollar bill to put into the card.

And then we had to gather up all the brothers and sisters and friends, with all the children in stiff and scratchy Sunday best, and gather with the pastor around the font, the silver bowl in the wooden stand near the front of the church. And, at last, with water poured and word spoken, the baby was named and claimed as one of the flock.

We added a little bit at the end of the service from the old *Lutheran Hymnary* (Augsburg Publishing House, 1913), and in the last verse of number 114 we sang:

"Now upon Thy heart it lies,  
What our hearts so dearly treasure;  
Heavenward lead our burdened sighs.  
Pour Thy blessing without measure;  
Write the name we now have given,  
Write it in the book of heaven."

We sang it just once, but often in our prayers for our godchildren, we reminded ourselves—and them—that their names are written.

We watched as that water was poured and listened to the words the pastor spoke as the baby's name was written in heaven's book. The baby will never know how many conversations the godparents began and ended with, "He's one of ours, you know."

These baptized ones are more than friends' children, more than fellow parishioners, more than younger relatives. Their joys and troubles are our joys and troubles. We were there—we saw their names written in the book of heaven. 🌸

**Marj Leegard** and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.



BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY

## WOMEN TOUCHED BY GRACE

by Angela Shannon

One morning over coffee, I opened the latest issue of *Seeds for the Parish* looking for a few ministry ideas or a fresh perspective on evangelism. I think of *Seeds* as the ELCA newsletter. As I scanned the paper, I noticed an advertisement for a program called “Women Touched by Grace.” The ad was so small that I could have easily missed it. It was a grace moment to be sure,

because any other time, I would have quickly glanced at it, folded the paper, and gone about my day. But my eyes lingered on that little advertisement with its brief description of a three-year spiritual renewal program for clergywomen, with a Benedictine pilgrimage to Rome at its conclusion. “It would be nice to visit Rome,” I thought, but it was the idea of spiritual renewal in community with other clergywomen

that drove me to turn on my computer and visit the Web site.

After a difficult first call, I’d decided that at some point in my ministry I would like to open a retreat house where clergywomen could experience rest and renewal. Applying to “Women Touched by Grace” at Our Lady of Grace Monastery felt like a natural step toward meeting that goal and fulfilling my heart’s desire. It just felt right.

Months later, a thin envelope arrived from Our Lady of Grace Monastery and "Women Touched by Grace." I was absolutely crestfallen. Everybody knows what a thin envelope means: the dreaded skinny letter of rejection. I dropped the letter unopened on my kitchen table and went to a church meeting. There it sat for two days. It was my uninvited breakfast and lunch partner, sitting there, staring at me. Finally I ripped the letter open and read it. At first I stood stock still in disbelief—a skinny letter bearing good news? It welcomed me as a Woman Touched by Grace! It took a moment for my surprise to give way to jubilation—and then I sang and danced around the apartment. My cat Miriam scampered under the bed. I was absolutely elated. Thirty women representing a wide array of denominations had been selected from a pool of 150 applicants. Even are Lutheran clergywomen. Twice a year for the next three years, we would convene at Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, Indiana, for 10 days. And always, the sisters of the monastery would receive us in Benedictine fashion—as they would receive Christ himself.

## The Rule

I knew very little about St. Benedict, but then again, very little is

known about St. Benedict. According to tradition, he lived sometime between the years 440 and 547. Some writers suggest that he was born as late as 480 in Nursia, Italy. What endures is the Rule he wrote for those who live in community as disciples of Christ. On its face, the Rule of Benedict is a handbook on the monastic life. The phrase "monastic life," on the one hand, conjures images of grim asceticism and harsh living. On the other hand, it calls up the ethereal image of monks in friar's robes walking about the mists of the monastery dreamily chanting. What's the truth in today's world? I bought a copy of the Rule and read it cover to cover.

In this Rule, Benedict is plain-spoken and straightforward, but it is not simplistic. Neither is there any mystical sleight of hand. Rather, the Rule opens with the word "listen." Four years later, I am still learning what it means to listen for the voice of God in an authentic way that responds as the prophets of old did, saying, "Here I am."

Reading the Rule was an important first step for me, but it was the sisters of Our Lady of Grace Monastery and the leadership team of Women Touched by Grace who modeled Benedictine spirituality for us. We gathered for the first session in November 2003. Some of us arrived weath-

ered by the demands of ministry. Others came jostled by life and the inevitable losses that living brings. All of us came to Our Lady of Grace Monastery with hearts full of hope and anticipation. God surely did not disappoint.

The program is the vision of Sister Mary Luke Jones, OSB. This energetic woman is small, but her welcoming presence is as big as all outdoors. She is the one who had the imagination to bring together Catholic women religious (that is, sisters) and Protestant clergywomen. She and her leadership team, with the help of a grant from the Lilly Endowment, designed a program for spiritual renewal that would include plenary sessions on creating community, spiritual practices and complementary disciplines, and leadership.

During our stays at the monastery, the sisters invited us to join them in their regular morning, noon, and evening prayer. The daily rhythm of prayer, study, reflection, and rest was restorative for each woman. What emerged was pure joy. Spontaneous laughter would erupt from these poised and self-possessed clergywomen. What a delight! When was the last time you heard your pastor laugh from her toes? We even had the nerve to challenge the sisters to a basketball game. They beat us horribly but we had so much

fun. At the close of each session, the sisters blessed us and sang to us, “until we meet again, know you are loved!” We returned to our congregations and were better pastors for the experience.

## The Pilgrimage

During the course of the three-year program, the Women Touched by Grace walked with each other through the hills and valleys of life. We rejoiced at births of children and grandchildren. We advised one another during challenging pastoral situations and painful Gethsemane experiences. We prayed each other through surgeries and illnesses, and through this, we learned from the Rule of Benedict to “keep death daily before our eyes.” This reminded me in profound way that resurrection is never far behind death—in fact, resurrection chases death down and overtakes it. There is freedom in this to live fearlessly, “preferring nothing to Christ.” We talked each other down from trees when we were frightened. We felt the awesome power of reconciliation when we disagreed. We laughed, worshiped, and cried with and for one another. As a group, we have grown immeasurably as pastors and graced women.

In November 2006, we gathered for the last time for our Benedictine pilgrimage to Rome.

I savored every moment because chances were that we would never be together as a group again. We stayed for two weeks at a Benedictine monastery, keeping the daily round of prayer and study in between taking in the sights of Rome. On our final night together, we gathered at a fabulous restaurant. It was bittersweet because we knew something deeply meaningful in our lives was about to change. Then Sister Mary Luke announced that our grant had been extended so we could convene twice more. There was a collective scream and tears of joy.

We gathered at Our Lady of Grace Monastery in November 2007 and will convene again in February 2009. This is good news. The better news is a new class of 20 have joined the Women Touched by Grace program. They too will learn Benedictine spirituality. They will be renewed and refreshed for the service of the Gospel and the transformation of the church. As clergy are strengthened, so too are their congregations and the people in them.

## The Gathering

The Women of the ELCA’s Triennial Gathering, “Come to the Waters,” is aptly named because we will be refreshed at this cooling stream in July in Salt Lake City. In many ways it reminds me of

Women Touched by Grace. Old friends will gather. There will be prayer, worship, and opportunities for learning and insight. Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, will give the keynote address. Her writings reveal a Christ-centered wisdom woman. There will be eight chaplains in attendance, including myself; six of us are Women Touched by Grace. And all of us are prayerful that the Holy Spirit will open our hearts that we will listen to the voice of God in new and wonderful ways.

I recommend *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages* by Sr. Joan Chittister and *A Forty-Day Journey with Joan Chittister* by Beverly Lanzetta as good books to learn more of what Benedictine spirituality offers the entire church regardless of denomination. Both are available through Augsburg Fortress. To keep in touch with the latest news from the Triennial Gathering go to [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org).

To learn more about the Women Touched by Grace program and other programs offered by Our Lady of Grace Monastery see [www.benedictinn.org](http://www.benedictinn.org). 🌿

**The Rev. Angela Shannon** is associate pastor for mission outreach and evangelism at Trinity English Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne, Ind. Her passion is sharing Christ with others. She will serve as a chaplain at the Triennial Gathering in July.



ET US PRAY

## Living Our Vows

by Debra K. Farrington

**Bleary-eyed from getting** up long before sunrise, I stared at the “departures” board at the airport. My flight was cancelled. Even worse, there were no more flights to my destination that day. A storm front the day before had played havoc with all the airlines. I was tempted to rant and rave, even though that wouldn’t accomplish anything but raising my blood pressure.

Then I remembered the subject for this column—living out our baptismal vows—and realized I was being handed an opportunity to practice my own. “Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you from God?” Being civil to the airline employee who was trying to solve my problem was a way of renouncing the sin of treating others as if they were of no consequence to me or to God. The weather was hardly her fault. And so I took a deep breath and tried to respond courteously to her efforts to help. There were plenty of other angry passengers in line, and with her day starting like this she was in for a long one. Maybe I could be a brief respite for her.

But I confess: When I hear those baptismal vows I am overwhelmed. I often wonder how any of us can say “yes” to them. “Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God?” “Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God?” This, along with renouncing the sins that draw us away from God, is major stuff. How can we possibly fulfill the promises we’re making?

Yet opportunities to live out our baptismal vows abound. The first step toward living them is recognizing how often we get a chance to do just that. Leaving the office on time rather than working another 12-hour day is a way of renouncing the devil’s temptation to consider ourselves indispensable or to put work before family, rest, community, and prayer. Gathering for worship with our families and close friends or feeding others in the local soup kitchen can be ways of renouncing the powers of this world that rebel against God. Refusing to judge someone else or to pass along a juicy tidbit of gossip helps fulfill the promise to renounce the sins that draw us away from God. Yes, those baptismal vows are big, even scary, but there are hundreds of simple ways to live them out in daily life.

So let me invite you to look at those baptismal promises afresh. Write them on a piece of paper and start listing ways you can act on them. Keep adding to those lists as ideas come to you. Focus not only on what you can do, but what you already have done by looking at those vows each evening and making notes about the things you did or said during the past day that fulfilled one or more of the baptismal promises. You may discover, as I did, that keeping them is as simple—and as difficult—as not yelling at an airline employee on a stormy morning. 🌿

**Debra Farrington** is a retreat leader and has written eight books of Christian spirituality. Her Web site is [www.debrafarrington.com](http://www.debrafarrington.com).



## CALENDAR NOTES

# July/August

*compiled by Audrey Novak Riley  
from sources including Evangelical  
Lutheran Worship (ELW), Sundays  
and Seasons, and Lutheran Book  
of Worship (LBW), published by  
Augsburg Fortress, Publishers  
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## July

This month we celebrate the lives and examples of several people, both men and women, who knew Jesus in person: Thomas, James, Mary Magdalene, and the siblings Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany.

### 3 Thomas, Apostle

We know Thomas as the one who said he wouldn't believe Jesus was risen until he saw the wounds in his hands and feet—and Jesus showed him. The texts appointed for Thomas' feast don't include that story, but they include the story of Gideon, who wouldn't believe until he saw hard evidence, too. Today's readings are Judges 6:36–40; Psalm 136:1–4, 23–26; Ephesians 4:11–16; John 14:1–7.

### 4 Independence Day

When was the last time you read the Declaration of Independence? Why not read it as part of your devotions today? You can find it (and even add your signature) at the National Archives' excellent Web site: [www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration.html). Pray in thanksgiving for the courageous men and women over the centuries who have stood up to defend the liberties outlined in that Declaration.

### 6 Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Today Jesus tells us that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. What's that about? Here's one interpretation: The burden Jesus gives us is our duty

to our neighbor. Recall how the Good Samaritan sets his own business aside and takes care of the man on the road. That was a lot of work; how could that burden be light? Because when we serve our neighbor, we set our own worries aside. And that lightens our load. Today's texts are Zechariah 9:9–12; Psalm 145:8–14; Romans 7:15–25a; Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30.

### 8 Triennial Convention Opens

Pray today for the women from every synodical women's organization who have come together in Salt Lake City to deliberate and vote on matters important to our ministry. Keep up with the business on our Web site, [www.womenofthelca.org/tc08](http://www.womenofthelca.org/tc08).

### 10 Triennial Gathering Opens

Today pray for the women arriving in Salt Lake City for our Triennial Gathering, the largest regular gathering of adults in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. You can keep up with the doings there on our Web site, [www.womenofthelca.org/tg08](http://www.womenofthelca.org/tg08).

### 11 Benedict of Nursia, Abbott

In about the year 530, this Italian monk wrote his Rule for Monastics, setting out a balanced, healthful, productive way of life for people living together in community. Since about the year 700 communities of women have lived by this Rule as well. There are Lutheran Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox Benedictine monastics;

ve met a community of Lutheran Benedictine sisters on the Women of the ELCA anniversary tour of Germany last year. There are also Benedictine oblates—you might call them associates—who live outside monasteries, with their families, working regular jobs just like their neighbors. Several Lutheran women pastors who have embraced the Benedictine spirituality are serving as chaplains at the Triennial Gathering; read more about one of them beginning on page 6.

### 3 Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

You might lift up in prayer the women at the Triennial Gathering who will be hearing and praying with these same Scripture passages at closing worship today: Isaiah 55:10–13; Psalm 65:1–13; Romans 8:1–11; Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23.

### 10 Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Jesus' parable about the weeds among the wheat warns us against taking on God's work of judgment. God will take care of the weeds in God's time, not ours. Today's texts are Isaiah 44:6–8 or Wisdom 12:13, 16–19; Psalm 36:11–17; Romans 8:12–25; Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43.

### 12 Mary Magdalene, Apostle

The word *apostle* means "one who is sent," and Mary Magdalene was

sent to spread the Good News by the Risen Lord himself—and we can imagine she didn't waste a minute to carry out his command! Who can you tell today? The texts appointed for Mary Magdalene's feast are Ruth 1:6–18 or Exodus 2:1–10; Psalm 77:23–28; Acts 13:26–33a; John 20:1–2, 11–18.

### 25 James, Apostle

Today's second reading tells of the martyrdom of James, the only martyrdom of an Apostle described in Scripture. The lessons appointed for James' feast are 1 Kings 19:9–18; Psalm 7:1–10; Acts 11:27–12:3a; Mark 10:35–45.

### 27 Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Today's first reading tells us about young King Solomon, who even at the beginning of his reign was wise enough that when God asked him what he wanted, he humbly asked for more wisdom. And the Scripture tells us that his request pleased God. What does that tell us about what God values in rulers? What does it tell us about what we should value in our own rulers? Today's texts are 1 Kings 3:5–12; Psalm 119:129–136; Romans 8:26–39; Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52.

### 29 Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany

The Gospels of Luke and John describe these three siblings as

friends of Jesus; it's comforting that Jesus had friends as well as followers. We can see what good friends they were by what each of the sisters felt free to say to Jesus when their brother had died: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21, 32). What does that tell us about our own prayer life as friends and followers of Jesus?

### August

As the summer wears on toward fall, we hear Jesus tell us over and over what it means to be the church: Feed the hungry, comfort the fearful, care for the sick, confess the faith.

### 3 Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Today's Gospel is the story of the feeding of the 5,000. For weeks, Jesus has been telling us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like; today he shows us. Today's readings are Isaiah 55:1–5; Psalm 145:8–9, 14–21; Romans 9:1–5; Matthew 14:13–21.

### 8 Dominic, founder of the Order of Preachers

When this Spaniard was just finishing his theological studies, a famine desolated the country. He sold everything he owned, even his treasured manuscripts, and gave the money to the poor. When a friend scolded him for selling the

valuable books, he said, “Would you have me study off these dead skins, when people are dying of hunger?” His work, and the work of the order he founded, combined that compassion with a dedication to learning and preaching. Dominicans today often say they preach with the Scripture in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

#### 10 13th Sunday after Pentecost

Today we see Jesus coming to the disciples in the storm and calming their fears. How has Jesus come to you in your time of fear and doubt? 1 Kings 19:9–18; Psalm 85:8–13; Romans 10:5–15; Matthew 14:22–33.

#### 11 Clare, Abbess of San Damiano

This Italian noblewoman was only 18 years old when she heard Francis of Assisi preach a Lenten course, and it changed her life forever. On Palm Sunday 1212, she vowed herself to the Franciscan way of life. Her sister Agnes joined her and together they founded the order now known as the Poor Clares. The rule these contemplative sisters live by is the first written by a woman. She died on this date in 1253.

#### 15 Mary, Mother of Our Lord

A feast in honor of Mary has been observed in late summer since possibly the year 500. The ancient Creeds we recite during worship

always say that Jesus was “born of the virgin Mary,” that is, that he was truly human, born of a woman like all of us. On the other hand, by telling us that his mother was a virgin they attest to the fact that he was always more than human. In Mary, virgin and mother, God tells us that Jesus is both truly God and truly human. The readings appointed for Mary’s feast are Isaiah 61:7–11; Psalm 34:1–9; Galatians 4:4–7; Luke 1:46–55.

#### 17 14th Sunday after Pentecost

That little exchange between the woman and Jesus in today’s Gospel always makes us wonder. Perhaps the lesson we can take from this story is that the Lord doesn’t frown on women who speak up for what they need. The texts appointed for today are Isaiah 56:1, 6–8; Psalm 67; Romans 11:2a, 29–32; Matthew 15:10–28.

#### 20 Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux

This French mystic was deeply devoted to the humanity of Christ, and therefore to the emotional aspect of faith. You might read or sing his tender hymn, “Jesus, the very thought of you” (ELW 754) today in your devotions. Bernard died on this date in 1153.

#### 24 15th Sunday after Pentecost

In today’s Gospel, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son

of the living God—something he learned not from human beings but through God’s revelation. We’ve learned the truth through other human beings: our parents, pastors, teachers. Was God working through them? The passages appointed for today are Isaiah 51:1–6; Psalm 138; Romans 12:1–8; Matthew 16:13–20.

#### 25 Bartholomew, Apostle

This apostle is named only in lists; the Gospel of John names Nathanael in places where we would expect Bartholomew. The texts for Bartholomew’s feast are Exodus 19:1–6; Psalm 12; 1 Corinthians 12:27–31a; John 1:43–51.

#### 28 Augustine, Bishop of Hippo

This brilliant philosopher was brought to faith by the eloquence of Bishop Ambrose of Milan and the untiring prayer of his mother Monica. His writings are still read today, particularly his spiritual autobiography, *Confessions*.

#### 31 16th Sunday after Pentecost

In today’s Gospel Jesus comes to the point: He must go to Jerusalem, suffer, die, and rise again. Peter had something else in mind for his Messiah. If you’d been in Peter’s sandals, what would you have said? Today’s readings are Jeremiah 15:15–21; Psalm 26:1–8; Romans 12:9–21; Matthew 16:21–28. \

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## What's Coming Up in LWT

Here is your guide to what's coming up in the next year in *LWT*. On the next few pages you'll find issue themes, Focus on Health topics, and information about the 2008–09 Bible studies. This synopsis is intended to give you, our valued reader, a sneak peek into the articles and ideas we will be digging into over the next year. Our goal is to tie together the liturgical and cultural calendars, blend in topics that are of interest to the women who make up our readership, and package it all together in a beautiful magazine for your reading pleasure.

## Interested in promoting

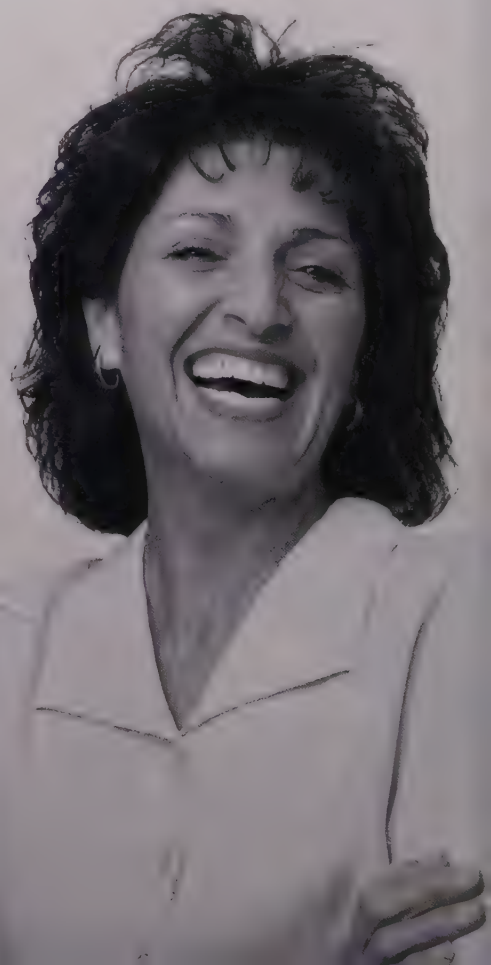
*Lutheran Woman Today* magazine?

Please let us know. New subscriptions, renewals, and gift subscriptions are always welcome and encouraged. If you are planning an event, we'd love to provide complimentary copies of the 2008–09 promotional brochure. This resource is handy for longtime readers as well as those who are new to the magazine. For copies of the brochure, please contact Laura Barkenquast at [laura.barkenquast@elca.org](mailto:laura.barkenquast@elca.org) or call her at 800-638-3522, ext. 2737.

## Bold thoughtful women read

*Lutheran Woman Today*

We surveyed our readers and found that they love to travel, exercise, study the Bible together, and work to make the world a better place. Each issue offers stories that inform, challenge, comfort, and encourage. Our award-winning Bible study brings together women of all ages and ways of life to explore God's word. Regular columns on prayer, health, the church calendar, and useful resources supplement the Bible study and faith-in-action articles.



## September 2008

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### Living Conversation

By the power of the Spirit, the Bible is a living conversation in which the texts talk to each other. How do we enter into the conversation? How will we find ourselves transformed?

### Bible study

Ruth: The Journey Begins

*Theme verse: Ruth 1:16b–17*

### Focus on Health

#### Ouch!

Bad backs. Stiff shoulders. And aching arches. Nearly 60 percent of Americans suffer from chronic pain—often in several body parts at once. During Pain Awareness Month, we offer expert tips for coping with—and beating—all the aches that afflict you.

## December

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### True Identity

Through baptism, our true identity is “child of God.” We are part of God’s family. How do we live out our identity faithfully and joyfully?

### Bible study

Daniel: Keeping the Faith

*Theme verse: Daniel 2:20*

### Focus on Health

#### The Power of Prayer

In Jeremiah 30:17, God pledges “I will restore health to you.” New research backs up this promise. The majority of U.S. patients rely on prayer, and 80 percent feel better after “spiritual healing.” Here’s how asking for spiritual help can boost your physical health.

## October

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### Beyond Loyalty

*Hesed* is a Hebrew word that means loving loyalty—extravagant loyalty that goes beyond what we would ask or expect. How do we practice *hesed* in our daily lives?

### Bible study

Ruth: The Plan for Security

*Theme verse: Ruth 2:12*

### Focus on Health

#### Aging Gracefully

Feet flatten. Waists widen. Then come the gray hairs. As we age, we change. But that doesn’t mean we can’t stay healthy. Decade by decade, here’s what to expect from your body—and how you can make the most of your autumn years.

## Jan.-Feb. 2009

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### Fiery Faith

In Daniel we read about the three men thrown into the fiery furnace—their faithfulness and God’s presence with them in their ordeal. Have you ever found yourself in a “fiery furnace”? God was there with you.

### Bible study

Daniel: Trial by Fire

*Theme verse: Daniel 3:17–18*

### Bible study

Daniel: Thrown to the Lions

*Theme verse: Daniel 6:26b*

### Focus on Health

#### Free from Addiction in 2009

Every New Year, we resolve to kick our bad habits. Here’s your sure-fire plan for conquering them with the right kind of support and self-care.

## November

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### Challenging Community

Sometimes situations or people challenge our communities by asking us to decide who’s in and who’s out. Sometimes our communities challenge us.

### Bible study

Ruth: A Place in Community

*Theme verse: Ruth 4:11*

### Focus on Health

#### Caregiver Burnout

Fifty million Americans care for ailing loved ones. And though they offer \$257 billion in services each year, their reward is often little more than an increased risk of depression and disease. During National Family Caregivers Month, learn how caregivers can cope.

## March

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### Hidden Power

There are many kinds of power. Some are obvious, but some are subtle and expressed behind the scenes. The question is: How do we exercise power wisely?

### Bible study

Esther: Two Queens in Persia

*Theme verse: Esther 2:17a*

### Focus on Health

#### The Scoop

Omega-3s for asthma. Whole grains for heart health. Fruits and veggies that lower your cancer risk. From antioxidants to zinc, here’s a guide to the nutrients that can make every plate of food a prescription for good health. During National Nutrition Month, eat up!

enjoy  
share  
think  
reflect  
pray  
love  
give

April

### Faithful Disobedience

Sometimes to be faithful to God is to be disobedient to other authorities. In the messiness and ambiguity of life, we ask for God's help in discerning the right thing to do.

#### *Bible study*

Esther: For Such a Time as This

*Theme verse: Esther 4:14*

#### *Focus on Health*

### Are You at Risk for Colon Cancer?

Yes, and so is everyone else with a colon, four to five feet of intestine where nutrients are absorbed and where small growths called polyps can become cancerous. Ninety percent of colon cancers strike after age 50, which is why you and your doctor must start screening then.

May

### Unexpected Heroes

Some people in the Bible turn out to be unlikely heroes. That's good news for us—we may be unlikely heroes of faith too.

#### *Bible study*

Esther: Reversal of Fortune

*Theme verse: Esther 9:1b*

#### *Focus on Health*

### Guide to Stroke Safety

Numbness. Weakness. Blurred vision. Sudden dizziness. Would you recognize these signs of a stroke? During American Stroke Month, learn how to guard against—and respond to—this leading cause of disability and number three killer of U.S. women.

June-July/August

### Seasons in the Light of Faith

The seasons of our lives—from girlhood to womanhood to old age—bring both joys and challenges. One thing we can count on is that God's love for us never changes.

#### *2009 summer Bible study*

### Mary: A Woman for All Seasons

This study will explore three seasons in the life of Mary, Mother of Jesus. Sessions will include the study of:

- Youthful spirituality, examining Mary's encounter with the angel when she was a teenager,
- Life-giving friendships, as seen in the relationship of Elizabeth and Mary, and

- Mary's (presumed) widowhood and role as an older woman leader in the early church.

ELCA pastor, author, wife, and mother Christa von Zychlin guides readers through the rich biblical and historical traditions that support an understanding of Mary as a role model and mentor for women today.

#### *June: Focus on Health*

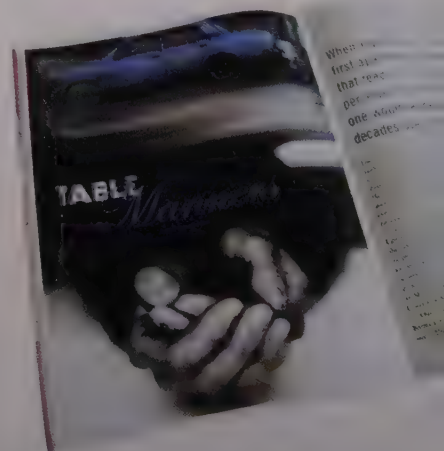
### Shingles: The Chickenpox Comeback

It can hide in your nerves for decades before it erupts in a painful, red rash. The virus that causes shingles can plague anyone who's had chickenpox. Learn how to protect yourself.

#### *July/August: Focus on Health*

### Listen Up!

What's that? Come again? When speech becomes softened, music sounds muffled, and you find yourself turning up the TV volume, it's time to get tested for hearing loss.



## The Hidden Hand of God: Wisdom Stories from Ruth, Daniel, and Esther

The wisdom stories of Ruth, Daniel, and Esther help us think about our call to discipleship in the complexity of today's world. You will see three recurring "H" themes throughout the study.

*Hesed* is a Hebrew word meaning extravagant loving loyalty that goes beyond the expected. Exploring it in these books will help us to examine how God is calling us to express *hesed* in our lives.

*Heroic actions* involve great risks to the one performing them. They are brave actions for the sake of others. Studying the leading characters in

these stories will challenge us as we think about the risks God calls us to take as a part of faithful discipleship.

*Hidden hand* refers to the often-unseen presence of God in all three books. Discovering how God works in these stories allows us to reflect on how God sometimes seems hidden in our lives or in the lives of those we love—and how we are called to live through such times.

As we study these books together, we pray that we grow in confidence of God's never-ending love for us and that we gain courage to take the risks God may be calling us to.



**The Revs. Gwen Sayler and Ann Fritschel**  
co-authored the 2008–09 Lutheran Woman Today Bible study *"The Hidden Hand of God: Wisdom Stories from Ruth, Daniel, and Esther."*

To find out more about the authors and their thoughts and conversations that went into the formation and creation of the study, see the article on page 18.

**Interested in introducing the Bible study at your group or synodical convention?** Contact Laura Barkenquast at [laura.barkenquast@elca.org](mailto:laura.barkenquast@elca.org) or call 800-638-3522, ext. 2737 to discuss details. Would you like to attend an event already slated for your area? Scheduled events are posted at [www.lutheranwomantoday.org](http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org) as they become available.

## Bible Study resources

The only piece essential for the "The Hidden Hand of God" is a subscription to *Lutheran Woman Today* magazine; however, the following companion pieces add depth and meaning to the study. See order information for prices.

### Leader Guide

The Leader Guide provides the Bible study leader with additional background information not found in *Lutheran Woman Today* and makes the experience of leading the group easier and more enjoyable. Included in this resource are tips on how to lead the discussion, instructions for activities, ideas on prayers, and more.

### Companion Bible

This handy volume puts the study texts in one convenient place. Printed in an easy-to-read size, it offers biblical texts for every session. It also provides participants with space to jot notes, underline, or highlight.

### Bookmark

"The Hidden Hand of God" bookmark is a terrific way to promote the Bible study and makes a great gift for group members. It is sold in packs of 12.

Call 1-800-328-4648 or order online at [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org)

Go to Store, Lutheran resources, Lutheran Woman Today magazine for online order form.

Bible study companion pieces subject to applicable sales tax and shipping charges. Call 1-800-328-4648 for rates and to order.

### Lutheran Woman Today SUBSCRIPTION

<b>1 year</b>	10 issues	\$12
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<b>3 years</b>	30 issues	\$33

### Bible study companion pieces

<b>Leader Guide</b>	978-6-0002-2093-8	\$6.95
<b>Companion Bible</b>	978-6-0002-2094-5	\$3.95
<b>Bookmark</b>	978-6-0002-2092-1	\$3.75

# THE HIDDEN A CONVERSATION HAND OF GOD



*The authors of the 2008–2009 LWT Bible study share their thoughts about “The Hidden Hand of God.”*

*by Ann Fritschel and Gwen Saylor*

### THOUGHTS FROM GWEN AND ANN:

Having had fun teaching together at Wartburg Theological Seminary for a number of years, we welcomed the opportunity to work together on the 2008–2009 Bible study for *Lutheran Woman Today*, “The Hidden Hand of God: Wisdom Stories from Ruth, Daniel, and Esther.” As our students would be quick to tell you, we delight in friendly competition and banter. We trust this has carried over a little bit into our joint writing project.

We began pondering how to approach writing the Bible study as we begin most of our joint projects—over pizza at our favorite café. The editors of *LWT* had requested that we focus on writings from the wisdom tradition (which includes, for example, the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, as well as Ruth, Daniel 1–6, and Esther). After listing on the back of a napkin all the major wisdom themes we could think of, we decided that a helpful approach would be to limit our focus to several themes that carry through all the books we will invite you to read.

Being a tad obsessive about alliteration, Gwen fixated on the list of themes until the three “h” words you will discover throughout the study appeared. Being equally obsessive about larger theological issues, Ann focused on the setting of each biblical book in the

wisdom and wider biblical traditions. Once we had all this done—and the pizza crumbs were cleared away—we divided up the writing assignments. Ann is the author of the sessions on Esther and Daniel 1–2. Gwen is responsible for the sessions that focus on Ruth and Daniel 3–6.

### THOUGHTS FROM ANN:

For a long time I have been fascinated by the wisdom tradition in the Bible. Unlike the prophets who received direct revelations from God, the writers of the wisdom literature discerned divine revelation in a more subtle way. You do not often find “Thus says the Lord” in the wisdom tradition. Instead, the inspired writers of the wisdom tradition discerned God’s will and teaching through looking at creation. They observed those ways of life that led to wholeness and blessing, to God’s will for all creation, and then encouraged others to follow in these “paths of righteousness” and “ways of peace.”

I spiritually resonate with this literature in a couple of ways. I don’t often hear the voice of God directly speaking to me; it is usually a more gentle inspiration as I read Scripture, worship, pray, enjoy nature and creation, and converse with others around me. Often, for me, the ways God is at work in the world are subtle and more easily recognized in hindsight. I also appreciate that wisdom understands that how you live makes a difference in the world. I’m not talking about works righteousness and earning our way to heaven. But when we follow God’s ways and words, when we live out faithful love and loyalty to one another and sometimes take risks on behalf of another, God’s peace and love are made visible to the world in our actions.

Perhaps Proverbs is the best-known of the wisdom literature. I have several biblical proverbs embroidered and framed on my walls. Yet rather than studying these short sayings, Gwen and I thought it might be easier to study wisdom themes through the use of some of the Bible’s most interesting stories.

## THOUGHTS FROM GWEN:

My initial task in our writing process was to find a way to organize our long list of wisdom subjects into several key themes that would carry through the entire study. After spending way too long obsessing about alliteration, I stumbled on the three “h” words that run through the entire study: *hesed*, heroism, hidden. *Hesed* is a Hebrew (another *h*!) word defined as “loving loyalty, faithfulness, loving kindness.” It refers to devoted loyalty that reaches beyond the expected to unanticipated depths. As might be expected, heroism refers to actions undertaken for the sake of others that involve great risk to the one performing them. The final theme word, hidden, points us toward the hand of God at work in the *hesed* and heroism of the characters in the biblical books we will study. Seeing how God’s hidden hand is revealed in each of the biblical stories will give us opportunity to reflect on how God sometimes seems hidden in our lives or in the lives of those we love and how we are called to live in those times.

## THOUGHTS FROM GWEN ON RUTH:

I confess that I was excited to be able to write on Ruth. So often what people remember of Ruth is the “whither you go, I will go” poem. It is a beautiful poem, but it conveys only a very small part of the message of Ruth. Set in a bucolic landscape where everyone in town knows everyone else, the story of Naomi and Ruth’s journey back to Naomi’s hometown explores the difficult question of how a community receives or rejects outsiders, particularly when those outsiders are the subject of controversial biblical laws.

Chapter 1 introduces us to the main characters—Naomi, the bitter widow returning home to Israel without male heirs to redeem her land for her, and Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law determined to accompany her on the journey to her home—where Moabites have been despised for generations. In chapter 2, Ruth’s *hesed* to Naomi begins to bear fruit as Ruth meets Boaz, who

has legal standing to redeem Naomi’s property and to provide her dead husband a male heir to carry on the name of the dead. Their seemingly chance encounter prepares the ground for the seed that will sprout and blossom later in chapters 3 and 4.

In these chapters, Ruth’s *hesed* will move her to heroic action in a nighttime threshing floor scene that will culminate in the revelation of God’s hidden hand working through the actions of the characters to bring the story to its happy ending.

As delightful and inspiring as the book of Ruth is as a story, it also invites and challenges us to ponder deeply several issues raised and resolved in its four short chapters. One of these is the difficult question of how we respond to outsiders in our midst, particularly when certain biblical texts seem to prohibit us from welcoming them. What criteria does the Bible call us to use when discerning whom we shall or shall not welcome fully into our communities?

Another related issue focuses on how we read the Bible, particularly when one set of passages seems to conflict with other biblical set of texts. Are they really saying the same thing? If not, which is authoritative—and why? As Ann and I will discuss at the conclusion of this article, these questions invite us to reflect deeply on how we as Lutherans read the Bible.

## THOUGHTS FROM ANN ON DANIEL 1—2:

While also featuring the themes of *hesed*, heroism, and hidden hand of God, the stories of Daniel 1–6 invite us into a very different world than the agricultural setting of Ruth. As we read, we find ourselves transported to the royal courts of Babylon and Persia where young men of the conquered Jewish nation, forced to serve their conquerors, struggle to remain faithful to Israel’s God no matter the cost to them as individuals.

In Daniel 1–2 we meet Daniel and his friends, who are willing to serve the foreign king but not at the expense of their faith and religious practices. Daniel’s

ability to interpret the king's dream shows that God is more powerful than any human king and is worthy of our praise. These chapters invite us to think about what religious practices define us as Christians and lead us into a discussion of biblical praise.

### THOUGHTS FROM GWEN ON DANIEL 3—6:

In Daniel 3–6 we continue to meet kings and their cronies who think they have power to harm the young men, little realizing that the God of Israel is supreme and will hold oppressors accountable.

Witnessing the journeys of the characters we encounter in these stories will give us food for thought as we ponder our own journeys and reflect on our responsibilities to local and global justice. As in the case of Ruth, these stories also will give us opportunity to discuss how we as faithful communities interpret controversial biblical laws that seem to no longer be life-giving in our time and place.

### THOUGHTS FROM ANN ON ESTHER:

I have always been a little challenged by the character of Esther. Sometimes I have seen her primarily as a beauty queen who uses her physical charms to save her people.

But I have grown to appreciate Esther as a woman of great wisdom and courage who uses all her gifts and abilities as a woman in a man's world to save her people. Her *hesed* toward her people leads her to risk her life to petition the king and unmask Haman, the man who would kill all the Jews.

God is so hidden in this book that God is never even mentioned! Yet, the coincidences and ironies of these stories suggest that God is at work behind these scenes to save God's people.

As we read through the book of Esther, we will think about when we might be called to stand in solidarity with sexually exploited women and children, occasions when we too might have to act in holy disobedience

for the sake of others and how God works through the most unlikely people to bring about God's will.

### FINAL THOUGHTS FROM ANN AND GWEN:

To study the Bible is to enter a living conversation, a conversation that began during biblical times. As the people entered different situations and experiences, God often sent a new word to them. By the power of the Spirit, the biblical texts talk to each other. Some texts confirm other texts, while others contest them. We are invited to enter the living conversation, to hear the variety of voices in the biblical witness and to discern through those multiple voices how God is calling us to live faithfully in our own time.

It is both exciting and challenging to be invited into this conversation. As we always tell our seminary students, studying the Bible is one of the most risky enterprises they will ever undertake. By entering into the biblical conversations, "sitting with" the biblical conversation partners, and allowing them to inform our own conversation, we will be transformed for mission in ways we may not now dream possible.

As readers and teachers of the Bible, we treasure its words and find in it inspiration, challenge, and hope for our lives and for our world. To be invited by God to enter the biblical conversation begun many centuries before us and continuing until Jesus returns in glory is both a privilege and a responsibility. We are delighted to have the opportunity to partner with you in continuing that conversation as together we study Ruth, Daniel 1–6, and Esther. *Hesed*, heroism, and God's hidden hand await—welcome aboard! 🌸

**The Rev. Gwen Saylor** is a professor of Hebrew Bible at Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. She is a deaconess in the Valparaiso Lutheran deaconess community and an ELCA pastor. **The Rev. Ann Fritschel** is associate professor of Hebrew Bible at Wartburg Seminary. Before her academic career, she served churches in Dickinson, Mohall, and Hamerly, N.D. She is the director of the Center for Global Theologies at the seminary.



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WE RECOMMEND

**Resources for  
action, advocacy,  
programs, or  
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### **Celebrating bold women**

In its February 2008 newsletter, *TOTO*, Lutheran World Relief (LWR) highlighted the bold ministry of Rachel Price, a member of the Mission Action Committee for the North Carolina Synodical Women's Organization.

"For 20 years, Rachel has worked with Lutheran parishes throughout North Carolina to collect quilts, kits, layettes, and soap to send to LWR for distribution to people in need throughout the world," wrote Brenda Meier, LWR's director for parish and community engagement. "To organize such a successful collection annually is no small feat."

Rachel estimates that in 20 years of collections, more than 20,000 quilts have been sent from North Carolina women to LWR. To see the story, visit [www.lwr.org](http://www.lwr.org), click on resources, and open the February 2008 issue of *TOTO*.

Women are making quilts and assembling school and health kits to send to LWR at the Seventh Triennial Gathering of Women of the ELCA in Salt Lake City, Utah, July 10–13.

### **Church musical comedy coming to Chicago**

The Minneapolis-based musical comedy, *Church Basement Ladies*, will take the stage September 16–28 at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, Skokie, Illinois, near Chicago. Of every ticket sold \$2 is going to Women of the ELCA's scholarship fund.

Inspired by the books of two Lutheran women, Janet Letnes Martin and Suzann Nelson (*Growing Up*

*Lutheran*, *Cream Peas on Toast*), the comedy is a celebration of the church basement kitchen and the women who work there. The show features four characters and their relationships as they organize the food and problems of a rural Minnesota church.

For group tickets, call 312-423-6612 or visit [www.grouptheatertix.com](http://www.grouptheatertix.com). For more information on the Skokie show, visit [www.northshorecenter.org](http://www.northshorecenter.org). For more information about the play, visit [www.cbl-chicago.com](http://www.cbl-chicago.com).

### **Studying the Bible—the Lutheran way**

The ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August 2007 adopted a five-year initiative that invites all 4.8 million members to deepen their engagement with the Bible. Called "Book of Faith," the initiative is meant to make Bible study more inviting and accessible.

To support this, Augsburg Fortress has published *Opening the Book of Faith: Lutheran Insights for Bible Study*, which introduces key elements of the initiative, including how Lutherans view the Bible and how Lutheran traditions guide understanding of Scripture.

*Lutheran Insights* will be especially helpful to pastors and others who lead Bible study groups and to those who feel they need more Bible study direction.

For more about the Book of Faith initiative, go to [www.elca.org/bookoffaith](http://www.elca.org/bookoffaith). To learn more about upcoming Book of Faith resources from Augsburg Fortress, go to [www.augsburgfortress.org/bookoffaith](http://www.augsburgfortress.org/bookoffaith).



HEALTH WISE

## Treat Your Feet

by Molly M. Ginty

**Your feet are a miracle** of engineering. With 26 bones, 33 joints, 19 muscles, and 107 ligaments—each—they're made to run, dance, leap, even cartwheel. They're built to get you through this summer's hiking—and through enough walking to circle the globe four times. But fail to treat your feet right, and you could wind up hobbled for life.

"Foot health is especially important for women, who report four times as many foot problems as men," says Dr. Glenn Gastwirth, executive director of the American Podiatric Medical Association.

Why are women especially prone to corns, calluses, and blisters? Why do they account for 80 percent of foot surgeries at a reported cost of \$3.5 billion per year? In a word, shoes. Forty percent of women wear high heels daily—a choice that can ruin their foot health.

Wear two-inch heels, and it changes how you walk. Wear three-inch ones, and it puts seven times more stress than normal on your feet. High heels shift all the body's weight to a single joint behind the big toe, and over time, this strain—and the cramped, contorted position of the arch and toes in these shoes—can cause irreparable damage.

High heels can cause bunions (bony bumps at the base of the big toe), hammertoes (so bent they look like upside-down Vs), tight heel cords (shortening of the Achilles tendon), "pump bump" (a bony enlargement at the back of the heel), Morton's neuroma (pain caused by pinched nerves between the toes), and

stress fractures in foot bones. Though these problems are treatable, none are easy to cope with, and some may necessitate surgery.

The good news is that you don't have to sacrifice style in the name of better foot care. If you love heels, it's usually safe to wear them every other day. If you choose ones that are more than three inches high, don them for no more than three hours, and do simple foot stretches to relieve strain afterward. Alternate your shoes from day to day, and wear comfortable low-heeled ones whenever you're strolling or commuting.

Besides shunning round-the-clock stilettos, there are other simple "foot musts" to follow. To avoid athlete's foot and toenail infections, dry between your toes after bathing. To prevent plantar warts (caused by a virus), avoid walking barefoot in public places. To remove corns and calluses, reach for exfoliating cream. To prevent ingrown toenails, trim nails straight across. To avoid infection, make sure spa pedicure equipment is sterilized, and forgo scraping razors.

If you have foot pain, don't trudge through it, but instead see your regular physician or a podiatrist (foot doctor). One common complaint? Plantar fasciitis, inflammation of the tissue along the sole of the foot from heel to toe. Triggered by everything from flat feet to weight gain, plantar fasciitis causes a stabbing ache on the bottom of the heel, but can be treated with professionally-prescribed insoles, corticosteroid injections, and shock wave therapy.

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This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org) for more information.

Just as foot pain reflects your general foot care, it can also reflect your general health. Foot sores can be a sign of diabetes (problems processing the energy in food), and arthritis (painful, stiff joints) often strikes the feet first—all the more reason to seek medical help if you suffer from persistent foot problems.

#### Other top foot tips?

Note that regular running can damage and flatten feet, so get exercise shoes that are built for the shape of your foot and to balance any tendency to over-pronate (walk pigeon-toed) or under-pronate (walk duck-footed).

Remember that your feet expand as time goes on, as the natural padding under your heel and forefoot thins. After pregnancy or in your later decades, you may need shoes that are wider and a half to full size larger.

Buy shoes later in the day, when tissues are swollen and feet are at their largest. Since your feet may not be the same size, buy shoes to fit the larger foot.

Look for shoes with a rounded toe box, sole cushioning, and arch and heel support. Test-walk them before buying, making sure they grip your heel firmly, bend easily where your foot bends, and don't twist or pinch. Though you can have the store stretch new shoes in tight spots, note that there's no such thing as a break-in period, and that shoes should feel comfortable from the moment you start wearing them.

Don't spend the whole summer wearing flip-flops, as they provide no arch support and the repeated process of



lifting the heel can cause muscle tension and exacerbate plantar fasciitis.

Know that socks made of wool or cotton, not synthetic fibers, are best. Ditto leather shoes versus plastic ones. Natural materials allow your feet to “breathe,” and don't overwork their 250,000 sweat glands, which can excrete as much as a half-pint of moisture a day.

A quarter of your bones are in your feet, which bear a force equal to several hundred tons per day. Although 75 percent of Americans experience foot problems at some point, you don't have of them. Put your feet first, and you can continue strolling—and dancing, and yes, even cartwheeling—through today and all the decades to come. 🌸

**Molly M. Ginty** lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *Ms.*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Women's eNews*.

#### For more information:

General Foot Health

[www.apma.org/sapma/doc.asp](http://www.apma.org/sapma/doc.asp)

A photograph of a person's hands cupped together, holding water. The background shows a rocky shore with waves crashing against the rocks, creating white foam. The overall tone is warm and somewhat desaturated.

*Called*

TO SERVICE

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. [Romans 6:3–4]

The church is glowing with yellow light during evening Lenten services. The hymns are in minor keys with words of confession and sorrow. I love Lent because you have permission not to be perky. My sisters and brothers and parents share the pew with me. I am part of this family and part of God's family. I am in seventh grade, and I cry because it's so beautiful. I have a sense of God's presence, as though one of us, at least, should give our life to ministry. Could it be me?

I decided to become a deaconess for two silly reasons. One is because of the Lenten tears. The other is because a mission pastor came through our little town one day and told our class that the Lord had need for pastors, teachers, missionaries, and *deaconesses*. He said a

word I had never heard before: deaconess. Years later, because I "accidentally" went to a university that had a training program for church workers, I fell in with deaconess students and was inspired by these bright, passionate, committed young women. I understood that being a deaconess would be a lifetime commitment. I prayed and walked a lot that year.

I leaned toward the sense of baptismal calling that God had begun in me. I made the commitment. I wanted to be part of God's team for doing good in the world. Again the tears came, tears of joy, and I was personally at peace.

How do you discern God's call? Are you inspired by others? Do your tears speak your heart? Does someone point out your gifts?

Baptized in Christ Jesus

Living wet is the only way to go. I have my daily struggles with the saint-and-sinner part of myself—the sinking and the swimming. But the splash of servanthood continues to delight me. I love this life. I wouldn't have it any other way.

There is a fountain of flowing water in a garden behind a church building in northern California. The youth group dreamed it up after some grumpy old men on the property committee complained that the teenagers weren't helping at church. The youth adopted that plot of ground as a confrontational response. They sweated on Saturdays to clear the brush and rubbish; they hoed and raked, and then they invited people to plant flowers. The garden took shape miraculously

quickly. A father offered to pour a concrete slab so we could have benches. The most memorable youth activity that summer was a three-hour conversation while we waited for the cement to dry. We agreed that some water would be significant. Eventually, a widow donated her husband's fountain, an act of love and letting go. We cried as a group the day it was installed. A few weeks later, two teenagers were baptized in that particular fountain, in a Dream Garden built by many hands and hearts.

Not all servanthood is done at church, you know. Most of it happens quite by accident, I think. I like to be well-organized. I'm good at making forms and file folders and being focused on task. This, I truly believe, is faithful service both to God and to the mission of the agency. At the same time, when a co-worker approaches your desk and says softly, "Today is the anniversary of my little brother's death," you simply stop what you're doing and listen. Maybe our best ministry happens in the interruptions.

### Baptized into death

Once I worked as an intake counselor for an agency that serves people with developmental disabilities. I interviewed a family who had a three-year-old boy with a diagnosis of autism. He could scream; he could run; he could throw things. But he

could not communicate; he could not tolerate cuddling; he could not calm himself down. One night, during a bath, his father left the room for a moment, only a moment, and that boy quietly slipped under the water, and he died. His parents were heartbroken.

I went to the funeral and wondered why I heard pigeons cooing. I thought God was clever to send such a lovely angel-sound at such a sad time. But there were no pigeons. It was the boy's mother, weeping. I know that God cries, too. I thought about how baptism is a way that we slip into the water and die with Christ. And like this little boy, we will rise with Christ, too. Does God cry at our baptisms even as God welcomes us into the family?

For a while, I felt dead tired and restless, working too hard, spinning my wheels. Change was nagging at me, a change that would mean a cross-country move, the abandonment of life as I had known it. Lingered in the warm shower was a way to pamper myself. And there, I heard a voice. *Well, you might as well go. You've already died.* The water. The word. The call to a new kind of service. I realized that I have already died. That's what baptism is about. Dying with Christ, and rising to new life. Through tears and a shower, I affirmed the call, and started over to work with the Lutheran Deaconess Association.

How does baptism wash over you, day by day? In the shower? Doing the laundry? Standing in the rain? Does God have a voice in your head? What does it sound like?

### As Christ was raised

I was interrupted again a year ago when the voice in my head said, *Love your neighbor as yourself.* "And who is my neighbor?" I challenged. You might guess what happened next. Around the corner, a family shelter was opening. The program director called on me to start a visitation program. "We need a hostess," he said. I got to know my new neighbors by meeting with them in the common room at the shelter. In order to sustain this commitment, I asked some church friends to join me, and so I got to know those neighbors better, too. In fact, the six of us have meetings each month at a local restaurant after work. I know that the shelter residents appreciate our attention, but it's a mutually satisfying relationship all around.

There are many ways to live out a baptismal calling to servanthood. I am moved by those unnamed servants who work during the night, at hospitals, at gas stations, at toll booths. I recognize the servant heart of parents of young children, and grown children who care for their aging parents. What about you? How do you live your new life in Christ?

## We walk in newness of life

wash feet—not for a living, but as a tangible reminder that servant ministry is about getting on your knees to do sometimes-lowly tasks.

For a few days last July, I helped some deaconesses wash feet at a national youth gathering. About 15,000 kids were there, and 200 found their way to our booth each day. Teenagers, youth leaders, pastors, and assorted staff people waited their turn in long lines. “How can we wash them all,” we’d worry. Well, we couldn’t. But we did what we could. The towels lasted about six hours. Then we stopped for the day.

I sat cross-legged on a cement floor for those hours. My back was so stiff I’d have to roll over to my hands and knees before standing up. I needed a pretty good reason to go through all that effort. In a way, I was grateful for my stiffness. I believe that God locked me into position so that I wouldn’t run away. It helped with my commitment to the task.

The question people asked most was: “What’s a deaconess?” (We get asked that a lot.) Our answer changes, depending on the person who asks and the place. At the youth gathering, our answer was “We are women who serve people in need. Just as Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, we are willing to serve in places that are not very glamorous.”

They’d ask lots of other questions: “How did you learn to massage feet?” “Did you have to go to college to learn how?” “How much do people usually pay?” “Do you do this for a living?”

I’d answer, “No, it’s just a symbol. Washing your feet is a symbol of the way Jesus served. We have lots of other ways of serving people.”

By that time, their eyes would roll and they’d be so relaxed that conversation was irrelevant. They’d sigh. They’d smile. And then the foot-washing wasn’t just a symbol any more. It was the most important thing I could be doing for that person at that moment.

One woman’s feet and ankles were really tense when she sat down. I invited her to relax, and she started to cry. Big tears rolled down her face. She was exhausted from trying to keep up with her teenagers. She was amazed that someone would actually rub her feet for free. She was under stress at home and at work, and she couldn’t hide it anymore. She just sobbed.

I spent a long time working on her feet. I dried them carefully. I dried until her tears dried, too. After a while, she asked if she could learn how to wash feet, and I said she probably could. That’s how the gospel affects us, you know. It turns us into servants.

I washed with my deaconess sisters. I overheard their conversa-

tions, and I liked how they were ministering to other feet. Sometimes, a deaconess who was a youth leader at the gathering came by and took my place. Sometimes college students helped. We all took turns.

I loved washing the feet of pastors. I thought about all the pastors I worked with, who served me communion, who stood by me in times of crisis or celebration. I thought how pastors get stuck in the authority position so often, and how they need a little loving care, too.

The feet I washed came in many shapes and sizes and colors and with accessories. Tattoos. Toe rings. Nail polish. Blisters. I’d take a good assessment as I washed, remembering to offer Band-Aids for owies.

Sometimes, kids would say, “Oooh. Isn’t it gross?” I’d say, “No, actually it’s a pleasure to be with you.” And it was. It was a joy. And that was a surprise.

And that is how walking wet makes sense, day by day. You lose yourself in service to others. 🌿

**Deaconess Diane Marten** is the director of education and formation for the Lutheran Deaconess Association in Valparaiso, Indiana.

**Learn more** about foot-washing and read other brief devotions in *Best of DeacPost*, available from the Lutheran Deaconess Association ([www.valpo.edu/lda](http://www.valpo.edu/lda)).



## It's a Matter of Death and Life

by Karen G. Bockelman

### BIBLE STUDY

#### Hymn

"This Is the Spirit's Entry Now,"  
*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 448;  
*Lutheran Book of Worship* 195

This is the Spirit's entry now:  
the water and the word,  
the cross of Jesus on your brow,  
the seal both felt and heard.

This miracle of life reborn  
comes from the Lord of breath;  
the sinless one from life was torn;  
our life comes through his death.

Let water be the sacred sign  
that we must die each day  
to rise again by his design  
as foll'wers of his way.

Renewing Spirit, hear our praise  
for your baptismal pow'r  
that washes us through all our days.  
Come, cleanse again this hour.

Text by and © Thomas E. Herbranson: Used by permission.

#### Opening Prayer

You are invited to begin this session by dipping your fingers in the bowl of water and making the sign of the cross as you say **"In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."**

#### The Sign of the Cross

Making the sign of the cross was not a custom in the Lutheran churches in which I grew up; I'm ashamed to admit we tended to think of it as superstitious. Frankly, seeing basketball players cross themselves at the free throw line didn't help.

Then, when I was in third grade, I attended a Lutheran school where the sign of the cross was used in chapel. I became fascinated by the gesture. I think there was something about using my body (or at least my hands) in such a ritual way that struck a deep responsive chord in me. However, I couldn't quite figure out the movements and my attempts left me feeling more than a little awkward and embarrassed.

As a pastor, I learned to make the sign of the cross publicly—at the beginning and the end of the worship service. I learned to mark a cross in oil on the newly baptized and in ashes on Lenten worshipers. I began to notice Lutherans reclaiming the practice as a personal action, but it still didn't come naturally to me.

Some years later, my daughter attended a Catholic preschool where she was taught the sign of the cross.

She began to insist on crossing herself as part of our daily prayer. After all, her teacher said you were supposed to! Sometimes children are our leaders, and so making the sign of the cross became part of our family practice, and, increasingly, my personal practice.

It should come as no surprise that Martin Luther, Augustinian monk and Roman Catholic priest, was accustomed to making the sign of the cross. It may come as a surprise to some that Martin Luther the reformer not only continued that practice, but in his *Small Catechism* encouraged its use at the beginning and ending of each day. For Luther, the sign of the cross was not only a reminder of baptism, but a powerful act of daily remembrance that we have been marked with the cross of Christ forever.

### Sharing

- > *What is your experience with making the sign of the cross? What are your feelings about the practice? Have they changed over time? What references to the sign or mark of the cross did you note in the opening hymn?*
- > *If you have a hymnal handy, glance through the rite of Holy Baptism in the front of the book (page 121 in Lutheran Book of Worship and page 225 in Evangelical Lutheran Worship). Where do you see the sign of the cross called for? (Look in the parts printed in red.)*

### A Matter of Death and Life

Last month we swam through the Bible, focusing on the richness of water imagery and stories, especially those that show us water as life-giving. But, in Scripture, as in our present world, water is not only a blessing. It is a source of life, but it can also mean death. In

the Creation, the waters of chaos are reined in and held back; they are not eliminated. What is life for one may be death for another. Noah and his family are saved, but the waters of the flood blotted out everything else. Israel walked through the sea on dry land, but the waters came back upon the Egyptians and Pharaoh's army was drowned.

Human beings cannot survive long without water, but drinking too much water too quickly can lead to water intoxication. Farmers need water for their crops and livestock—but are in trouble when there's too much or too little or it comes too soon or too late. Water can make the dry land blossom but the waters of a hurricane or tsunami can make a wasteland.

Death and life is also the message of the cross. According to the ancient Jewish law, anyone "hung on a tree" was cursed. The Romans perfected the cross as an instrument of execution, designed for protracted suffering and public humiliation. They considered crucifixion the ultimate penalty, the most wretched of deaths, and reserved it for the lowest classes (such as rebellious slaves) and the most heinous crimes (like treason). The cruel horror of crucifixion was meant to be a deterrent, and crucifixions were carried out along major roads and in other public places so that no one could miss the message. No wonder Paul wrote of how foolish and scandalous a crucified Messiah would seem to both Jews and Gentiles (see 1 Corinthians 1:22–23).

The ancients would have found it nearly impossible to imagine that a cross could ever be called wonderful, represented in fine art or beautiful jewelry, seen as a sign of faithful identity, a badge of honor rather than a symbol of shame. Jesus himself hints at this mixed message when, in John's Gospel, he speaks of "being lifted up from the earth" as an indication both

of the kind of death he would die and of the salvation his death would bring to the world (see John 3:14–15 and 12:32–33).

Baptism is a matter of death and life as well. As Jesus and his disciples journeyed to Jerusalem, Jesus spoke of the suffering that awaited him. James and John asked for places of honor and Jesus responded, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:32–40) As Jesus spoke of judgment and the end of the age, he said, “I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!” (Luke 12:50) It is clear that in these verses Jesus is not speaking of his baptism by John at the Jordan River, but of his death. Jesus tells us directly that if we mean to follow him, we are to take up our own cross (see Matthew 10:38; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).

What does that have to do with us, baptized with water? Read Romans 6:3–8 aloud. Paul writes of baptism as dying and rising with Christ. When we are baptized we are united with Christ, sharing in both his death and his resurrection.

Martin Luther referred to Paul’s words in *The Large Catechism*, and went on to say that baptism consists of two parts: first, being dipped completely under the water—the drowning of the old sinful self—and second, coming up from the water—the resurrection of the new person.

In Luther’s day it was customary to immerse the candidate three times in the water of the baptismal font, and baptism by immersion is not unknown among Lutherans today. I have heard more than one speaker imagine a baptism where the person being baptized would be held underwater long enough for the congregation to start to panic, then be triumphantly lifted up to sputtering, breathing life. I doubt any pastor could ever really get away with that, but it certainly would communicate dying and rising in a vividly unforgettable way.

### Sharing

- As you think back on the water narratives from Scripture that we discussed in the first session—the chaos before Creation, Noah and the flood, the Exodus through the Red Sea—where do you see images of death-and-life? How do you understand the death and life images of the cross?
- Where do you see or hear death and life in what happens in baptism? Have you ever witnessed a baptism that made that death-and-life image clear? What was it like?

### Daily Dying and Rising

Martin Luther understood baptism as a once for all event, just as God’s action in Christ was once for all. To repeat baptism would be to focus attention on our human actions and faith (which are always inadequate) rather than on the unfailing grace and promise of God.

Luther was baptized on St. Martin’s day, November 11, 1483, at St. Peter’s Church in Eisleben, Germany. Throughout his life, he drew strength and comfort from the certainty of that. When in doubt or despair, oppressed by sin and conscience, he would say, “But I am baptized! And if I have been baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body” (from *Large Catechism*, Baptism, 44).

If, in baptism, we have been united with Christ, then the worst is over. Death has no more power over us; we need not fear it, because we have already died. And if we have been united with Christ in a death like his, as Paul says, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. This is at the heart of our Christian faith; this is at the heart of what baptism means.

But although we are reborn children of God in baptism, we remain subject to the brokenness of sin. We are at one and the same time saint and sinner. Martin Luther insisted that the Christian life is a daily dying and rising: “The old person in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily sorrow

or sin and through repentance, and on the other hand . . . daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (*Small Catechism*). Each day is an opportunity to die to sin and rise to new life.

How can we do this? This daily dying and rising can be encouraged in a number of ways, including

- confession and forgiveness
- reading Scripture
- participating in worship
- daily prayer and the sign of the cross
- reading Luther’s catechism
- professing our faith by reciting the Creed.

These practices can be used by individuals, families, small groups, and larger gatherings. Several of them are combined in Luther’s Morning Blessing and Evening Blessing. See page 34.

Even with a daily habit of baptismal remembrance, there are significant times in our life journey when we, with Luther, might want to remember, “but I am baptized,” and be strengthened and sustained. The public ritual of Affirmation of Baptism (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 234–237; *Lutheran Book of Worship*, pages 198–201) is one way the community of faith can mark such times. This is most often used at confirmation and the reception of new members. But there are other times—moving into a nursing home, becoming a parent or grandparent, changing occupation or location, diagnosis of a chronic illness, retirement—when the community together can help us lay claim to the sure and certain promises of the God who has already claimed us in baptism.

## Consider

Baptism is at the foundation of our faith. How can we become conscious of this sacrament in our daily lives?


- Look again at the list of practices for daily baptismal remembrance. Pick one to make your own, perhaps using Luther’s Morning or Evening Bless-

ing (see page 34). Covenant with one another to do this for a specific period of time—perhaps until next month or your next gathering—and then share your experiences.

- What do you know or remember about your own baptism? Do you have photos, a certificate or bulletin, a gown or other clothing, a shell or candle, or the like? Set aside a special place for a visual reminder of your own baptism. Tell friends or family members about it; ask them about their own baptism.
- With the group, make a list of significant life changes that participants have experienced or that they anticipate. Consider how you might use an affirmation of baptism (public or private) to help you through such times of change. Talk with your pastor or other leaders about ways the congregation might acknowledge such times in the lives of its members.

## Closing

Gather around or turn your attention to the bowl of water in your midst. Together, offer prayers of thanksgiving for the gift of baptism, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the gift of the Scriptures, the teaching of Martin Luther. Give thanks for those who have gathered for this time of study, for their insights and sharing. Remember especially any who are in times of transition or change. End as you began, by dipping your fingers in the water and making the sign of the cross as you close, saying “**In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**”

If you wish, sing or speak the opening hymn again.   
**The Rev. Karen G. Bockelman** is assistant to the bishop in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA. She is presenting an adaptation of this Bible study to the delegates and participants of the Seventh Triennial Convention and Gathering of Women of the ELCA in Salt Lake City, Utah, July 8-10 and 10-13.

### The Morning Blessing

In the morning, as soon as you get out of bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say: "God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me. Amen."

Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you wish, you may in addition recite this little prayer as well: "I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger. I ask that you would also protect me today from sin and all evil, so that my life and my actions may please you. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen."

After singing a hymn perhaps (for example, one on the Ten Commandments) or whatever else may serve your devotion, you are to go to your work joyfully.

### The Evening Blessing

In the evening, when you go to bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say: "God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me. Amen."

Then, kneeling or standing, say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you wish, you may in addition recite this little prayer as well: "I give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have graciously protected me today. I ask you to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously to protect me tonight. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen."

Then you are to go to sleep quickly and cheerfully.

From Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*, included in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 1160–1167.

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LEADER GUIDE

# It's a Matter of Death and Life

by Karen G. Bockelman

## Preparation for this session

Once again the group is invited to gather around a water focal point. You may wish to fill a large glass bowl with water and place it on a table in the center of your group. You might place a cross and Bible near it (but not where they will get wet as people dip their fingers in the water). Fresh flowers or greenery from God's good earth will add to the beauty of this reminder of baptism.

You will need copies of the session (either copies of the magazine or downloaded from the magazine's Web site, [www.lutheranwoman.org](http://www.lutheranwoman.org)) and Bibles. Hymnals for everyone and copies of Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* (included in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 1160—1167) are nice but not required.

## Overview

In baptism we are joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus. This session will explore that reality through Scripture, the service of baptism and related rites, and Martin Luther's catechisms.

## Hymn

The suggested hymn includes references to the mark of the cross and to dying and rising each day.

The hymn may be sung to the familiar tunes LAND OF REST or NEW BRITAIN, which is also used with "Amazing Grace."

## Opening Prayer

To open this session, the members of the group are invited to dip their fingers in the bowl of water and make the sign of the cross as they speak the traditional words of invocation. This may or may not be a practice with which your group members are familiar. It is, however, a very ancient practice—the small sign of the cross on the forehead goes back to the second century, and the large sign to the sixth century. Martin Luther recommended it too. It's worth trying.

## The Sign of the Cross

There are a number of ways to make the sign of the cross. Perhaps the most common is the large sign: Hold your right hand with the thumb and fingertips together. Dip the fingertips in the water, and then touch your fingertips to your forehead, heart, left shoulder,

right shoulder, and back to the center. A slow, mindful gesture that reaches all the way up to the forehead and all the way out to each shoulder has a more prayerful feeling than a quick flutter like shooing away mosquitoes—someone in your group who is familiar with the practice may be willing to demonstrate.

I learned from a seminary worship professor that it might be easier to try crossing yourself if everyone in the group agrees to try first with their eyes closed. That way no one has to worry about doing it wrong in front of the others!

People may alternatively make a small sign of the cross on themselves or on another person: Dip your thumb in the water and trace a cross on your own or another person's forehead.

### A Matter of Death and Life

When we hear the phrase, "It's a matter of life and death," we hear a sense of urgency, the need to take immediate action. Some people think of baptism as a matter of life and death, a ritual necessary to avoid the death of eternal damnation, a kind of "fire insurance." There can be an almost superstitious sense that baptism will keep us safe.

Turning the phrase around—it's a matter of death and life—highlights the radical nature of baptism as both dying and rising. Being joined to Jesus is not a safe way to live. Jesus said that following him would mean taking up our own cross. Dan Berrigan, Jesuit priest and social activist, once said, "If you want to be a follower of Jesus, you better learn to look good on wood."

This is an opportunity to really explore the depth of the meaning of baptism. If you have a hymnal handy, take a look at the baptismal service in it. Encourage your group to reflect on what baptismal practices they have witnessed or experienced (in your congregation or another). Are there practices that seem to emphasize the death-and-life nature of baptism? How would your group react to immersion baptism? of an adult?

of an infant? Conversely, are there practices that seem to diminish the significance of baptism? I once heard of using a rosebud to sprinkle baptismal water on an infant's forehead. What would your group think of such a practice? Between those extremes, how can we, in Luther's words, "make baptism a true and complete sign of the thing it signifies" ("The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism," vol. I, *Luther's Works*, 35:29)?

### Daily Dying and Rising

Although a person is baptized once, the gift of baptism continues throughout a Christian's life. There are two emphases in this section of the study. The first is that the baptized can confidently claim God's action in baptism. Baptism does not depend on us but on God. Occasionally I have had pastoral conversation with someone who has discovered a new (or renewed) sense of the meaning of baptism and has asked to be baptized again because "now it will mean something to me." But to do so would put the emphasis in the wrong place—on human action rather than God's action.

Of course it's possible to live as though we are not baptized or at least as though being baptized has no meaning for our lives. But we can also live as though being baptized makes a difference. Doing that may take some practice, practice at daily dying and rising.

This section provides an opportunity to explore personal or community practices that encourage daily baptismal remembrance. It's not that individuals or your congregation aren't already doing many of these things, but there may not have been intentional thought about their nature as remembrance of baptism.

### Closing

The closing is designed to be quite simple—a time of prayer, baptismal remembrance, and perhaps song. 🌿



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## Living Water, Walking Wet

by Karen G. Bockelman

### BIBLE STUDY

#### Hymn

"Come to Me, All Pilgrims Thirsty,"

*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 777*

"Come to me, all pilgrims thirsty; drink the water I will give.  
If you knew what gift I offer, you would come to me and live."

*Refrain:*

Jesus, ever-flowing fountain, give us water from your well.  
In the gracious gift you offer there is joy no tongue can tell.

"Come to me, all trav'lers weary; come that I may give you rest.  
Drink the cup of life I offer; at this table be my guest."

*Refrain*

"Come to me, believers burdened; find refreshment in this place.  
Come, receive the gift I offer, turn to me and seek my face."

*Refrain*

"Come to me, repentant sinners; leave behind your guilt and shame.  
Come and know divine compassion, turn to me, I call your name."

*Refrain*

"Come to me, distressed and needy; I would be your trusted friend.  
Come and seek the gift I offer, come, your open hands extend."

*Refrain*

"Come to me, abandoned, orphaned; lonely ways no longer roam.  
Come and take the gift I offer, let me make in you my home."

*Refrain*

#### Opening

*The leader addresses the group.*

Do you desire to affirm your baptism?

*The group responds.*

**I do.**

Do you renounce the devil and  
all the forces that defy God?

**I renounce them.**

Do you renounce the powers of this  
world that rebel against God?

**I renounce them.**

Do you renounce the ways of  
sin that draw you from God?

**I renounce them.**

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ,  
the Son of God?

**I believe.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**I believe.**

Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:

to live among God's faithful people,  
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,  
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,  
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,  
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

**I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.**

(Affirmation of Baptism, text reprinted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 234-237  
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## Lake Effect

Washington Island lies off the tip of Door County, Wisconsin. One of the most striking sights on the island is Schoolhouse Beach. I've seen sandy beaches. I've seen the pebbly beaches of Lake Superior. But never before have I seen a beach covered with smooth, round white stones—washed, rolled, tumbled, polished for God only knows how long in the waters of Lake Michigan.

The first time I saw the stones, I identified with them. I, too, had spent a lifetime in the waters—the waters of baptism. I wanted so badly to pick out just the right stone and take it home, a reminder of the experience and what it meant to me. That is, until someone pointed out the sign announcing a \$25 fine for taking rocks from the beach! I had to be satisfied with a photo and the memory.

I have come to realize that the rocks need to stay in and by the water, ever shaped by the waves. In just the same way, I need to stay in and near the waters of baptism, ever shaped by the covenant God made with me in holy baptism. It will be a lifelong process.

## Sharing

➤ *Can you think of an event that has had a deep impact on your life? An event that has continued to shape your life, or perhaps changed your life? What does that feel like? How would you be different if that hadn't happened?*

## Living Water

One of the most vivid scenes in John's Gospel tells of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. We have all too often gotten stuck on the woman's supposedly shady past, but the story is about much more than that.

### READ JOHN 4:1-15.

Jesus' first spoken words in John's Gospel (1:35) are a question: "What are you looking for?" This is perhaps the unspoken question at the beginning of his conversation with the Samaritan woman. What is she looking for? Certainly she has questions of her own, religious questions, even theological questions: How is it that a Jew would ask a drink of a Samaritan woman? Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than Jacob who gave us this well?

There's a part of her conversation with Jesus that focuses on the practicalities of her daily trek to get water. The well where they met was located on the edge of town, a long and inconvenient journey. It was deep, not easy to draw from. Who wouldn't want to know about an easier source of daily water?

But the conversation quickly takes on deeper meaning with Jesus' talk of living water, gushing up to eternal life.

## READ JOHN 4:16–29.

It is the talk about many husbands that has led more than one commentator to focus on the woman's past. Some consider her words to Jesus a smokescreen to keep him from probing too deeply or even an attempt to seduce him. It may be that the obvious is true, and indeed she was the village scandal. Others have suggested that she was unable to have children, and this led one man after another to divorce her until finally, still needing a man to survive in a patriarchal society, she didn't even seek the courtesy of marriage. Still others contend that the husbands are not literal, but symbols of Samaritan infidelity, worshiping many false gods instead of the true God of Israel.

Whatever the truth of her life—religious, sexual, or otherwise—she continued in genuine dialogue with Jesus. She identified Jesus as a prophet, recognized the truth of worship in spirit rather than place. She longed for the coming of Messiah, who would proclaim all things. To this woman, and for the first time in John's Gospel, Jesus revealed himself as that Messiah.

### Sharing

- > *What do you think the Samaritan woman was looking for? What kinds of needs are described in the opening hymn? What are you looking for? How is Jesus living water for you?*

## Walking Wet

There are certainly baptismal themes in this story. There is catechesis—religious instruction—in the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well. Although Jesus does not baptize her, he does promise the gift of living water. Her response is to leave her water jar and return to the city to testify to her experience. I like to imagine her rushing off with drops of water still clinging to her skirts and splattering among the people of her town.

Later in John's Gospel, Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the festival of Booths or Tabernacles (John 7). Part of

the celebration included the daily carrying of a golden pitcher of water to the Temple, reminding the people of the water God provided in the wilderness and looking forward to the day when all nations would come to worship on God's holy mountain. On the last day of the festival, Jesus, who had been teaching in the Temple, stood and cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37b–38).

If Jesus is indeed living water for a thirsty world, can we his followers be anything less? We are called not just to be faithful disciples in church, but to live our faith in the world: to proclaim the Good News, to serve all people, to strive for peace and justice. These are our baptismal promises, promises we renewed together at the beginning of this session.

This is our Christian vocation, our calling. Home and school, community and nation, work and leisure, citizen, friend, colleague, family—all are places and relationships where God has called us to witness and to serve.

### Sharing

- > *Think again of what you (and others) are looking for. What are the needs you shared? How are you called to meet those needs for others?*

## Holy Water

### READ MATTHEW 25:31–46.

In this familiar scene of judgment, Jesus identifies his followers as those who have fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, visited the imprisoned, and—notice—*given drink to the thirsty*. We give of ourselves. We are called to be a cup of cool water for one another.

In some traditions, water that is set aside and blessed for use in baptism is called holy water. I would prefer to say that all water is holy. It is holy because it

is God's creation. It is holy because it sustains life. It is holy because God has chosen it to be a visible sign of grace. It is holy because Jesus speaks of himself as living water.

There is a water crisis in the world today. More than a billion people in the world have no access to safe drinking water. Many women and girls must walk as much as six miles every day to get water for their families. The southeastern United States has experienced the worst drought in a century. Elsewhere in our nation, water tables have been dropping, sometimes precipitously. Battles over water—both at home and abroad—are likely to be the source of major conflict in the century ahead.

### Consider

How might you (personally, as a group, as a congregation) engage in learning about and taking action on water issues?

- Collect newspaper, magazine, and Internet stories related to water issues. Look for local, regional, national, and international stories.
- Do an “audit” of your personal, family, and congregation water consumption. Covenant with one another to make some changes toward a wiser use of water resources.
- Staff a water station at a local event (such as a marathon or outdoor concert.)
- Clean up a nearby stream bed or lake shore.
- Check out the ELCA Good Gifts Catalog or the Lutheran World Relief Catalogue for giving ideas related to water.
- See the Women of the ELCA Web site for programs and initiatives related to water. Go to [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org).

### Closing

Gather around or turn your attention to the bowl and pitcher of water, along with the empty glasses. Take

turns pouring a small glass of water for one another, offering it with these or similar words: “Receive Christ’s living water; be water for others.” Let the extra glass of water represent those beyond your group who are in need of the water you give.

Give thanks for this time together and pray that your study, sharing, and learning may bear fruit in the days to come. Pray for those who witness and serve in Christ’s name and for your own opportunities to do so. Pray for the needs that have been shared in this gathering. Pray for those who experience drought or flood, those who do not have access to clean water, those caught in water conflicts. Pray for the healing of God’s creation, especially God’s gift of water.

And in closing, if you wish, you may read or sing the opening hymn again.

### Looking Ahead

In the next issue, we begin our nine-month study “The Hidden Hand of God: Wisdom Stories from Ruth, Daniel, and Esther.” To learn more, see “What’s Coming Up in *LWT*” on page 14. 🌿

**The Rev. Karen G. Bockelman** is assistant to the bishop in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA. She is presenting an adaptation of this Bible study to the delegates and participants of the Seventh Triennial Convention and Gathering of Women of the ELCA in Salt Lake City, Utah, July 8-10 and 10-13.

LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

*has a blog!*

Go to [www.lwtmagazine.blogspot.com](http://www.lwtmagazine.blogspot.com) to read notes from the editors and Bible study writers, and comments from readers. Coming soon: video clips of “The Hidden Hand of God” writers talking about the new study.

LEADER GUIDE

# Living Water, Walking Wet

by Karen G. Bockelman

## Preparation for this session

Once again the group is invited to gather around a water focal point: a large clear bowl of fresh water, perhaps with shells, sea glass, or tumbled stones around it or in it. The closing ritual calls for a pitcher of cold water and enough small glasses for each person in the group, plus one extra.

You will need copies of the study session (you can download it and this Leader Guide from the magazine's Web site, [www.lutheranwomantoday.org](http://www.lutheranwomantoday.org)) and Bibles for everyone. Hymnals for everyone would be useful, but are not required.

As leader, be sure to read the study in advance. You may wish to gather some resources related to water issues. The Women of the ELCA Web site has background information, prayers, and links. Go to [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org). The decade 2005-2015 has been designated as the United Nations Water for Life Decade ([www.un.org/waterforlifedecade](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade)); there are resources at that Web site.

## Overview

This session centers on John's account of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well. Her story and other Scripture passages that speak of living water will help us consider what it means to live a baptismal life. Although a person is baptized only once, living out of what baptism means continues as the Christian's primary vocation or calling in the world.

## Hymn

The text of the suggested hymn echoes the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. However, the words go beyond the specifics of that woman's situation. The words are new, but they are set to a familiar tune, *BEACH SPRING*. If your congregation sings "Lord, whose love in humble service," you know that melody.

## Opening

The opening ritual is an adaptation of the Affirmation of Baptism as found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. The emphasis is on the last part, affirming our intention to continue in those actions that are how we live out our baptism.

## Sharing

Throughout this session, the sharing questions encourage the group to share more deeply. It is certainly possible to have a lively discussion without much personal sharing, but there is the invitation to speak of life changing events and intensely personal needs.

Some will find this easier than others. As leader, take care that participants are not pushed to share beyond their comfort level. It may be helpful to have the group covenant to keep in confidence any personal sharing.

### **Lake Effect**

If the experience at Schoolhouse Beach appeals to your group, you might add to the bowl of water some smooth, rounded stones—perhaps one for each participant. You could also use sea glass, shells, or driftwood—anything shaped over time by the action of water.

### **Living Water**

Ask someone to read the Gospel story of Jesus and the woman at the well aloud. If participants have different Bible translations at hand, invite them to point out any differences they discover in the way the story is told or heard. Sometimes a very different retelling, such as *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, brings new insight to a familiar story.

Give some attention to getting past the woman's apparent sexual history. Does her story take on new meaning when you consider other possible interpretations of her situation? Does that make it any easier to identify with her? Let the words of the opening hymn help lead you into reflecting on what she and you are looking for.

### **Walking Wet**

Note of the Samaritan woman's response to her conversation with Jesus—witnessing to her neighbors. I think of her action in going back into town to tell what had happened to her in meeting Jesus as “walking wet”—that is, living out of Jesus' gift of living water.

John 7:38 may be a bit puzzling to some in the group, especially if they are seeing a different translation, for example, “out of *his* heart shall flow.” The original Greek word (*autou*, “his”) could refer to either Jesus or the believer, and scholars have disagreed about the precise meaning of this sentence since the earliest times.

This study uses the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. It allows us to emphasize our baptismal calling to let Christ's living water flow out of us into the world.

### **Holy Water**

We have come full circle in our study, back to a consideration of water itself. Through this exploration of Scripture and baptism, ordinary water becomes holy water. Christians are called to pay attention to and address the water crisis in our world, both personally and as communities of faith. The activities for consideration are suggestions for long-term action, not for activities to be carried out today.

### **Closing**

The action of giving water to one another is to connect water to our serving Christ as we serve our neighbor. The extra glass reminds us that there are others not among us today whom we are called to serve in Christ's name.

You may lead the prayer or invite participants to offer petitions. You have the option to sing the opening hymn or another hymn. “Rise up, O saints of God!” (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 669) would be a good choice.

If you have placed stones, shells, driftwood, or sea-glass in or near the bowl, invite participants to take one home as a reminder of this study.



*Picnic  
Promises*

*I promise we  
will be friends forever.*

*I promise my love and  
faithfulness . . . until  
death parts us.*

*We promise to care  
for this child.*

by E. Louise Williams

That fifth-grade girl views herself differently because she has a friend she can count on. Wives and husbands make choices and act in certain ways because of their marriage covenant. The life of that little baby in a Chinese orphanage and her new parents are changed forever by the commitments they make in the adoption process.

Our lives are different because of the promises we make. Our lives are different because of the promises made to us.

The promises made at our baptism shape our lives into something very different. Water and the word connect with faith, and our lives are never the same again.

The promises of baptism are first and foremost God's promises. God, *who is rich in mercy and love* is

the first to speak and act in baptism. In fact, it is only because of God's promise of great mercy and boundless love that we can dare to respond to God's invitation.

The Holy Scripture and Lutheran teachings describe God's baptismal promises with a rich variety of images and phrases. Those promises have been summarized this way:

*In holy baptism the triune God delivers us from the forces of evil, puts our sinful self to death, gives us new birth, adopts us as children, and makes us members of the body of Christ, the church.*

(ELW, p. 225, quoting Principle 14 from *The Use of the Means of Grace—A statement on the practice of word and sacrament*)

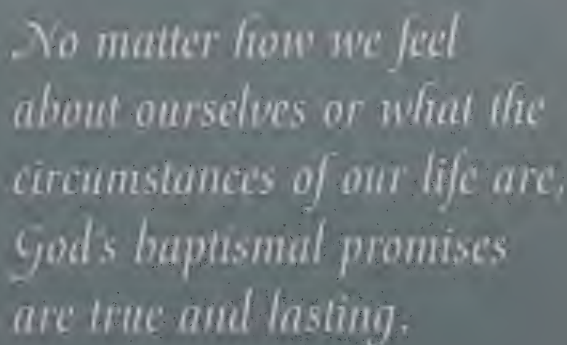
This is what God promises—and does in baptism. God does not

remove us from the world and the evil in it; rather, God breaks evil's hold on us and delivers us from evil's power. *God frees us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

These promises of God are rooted in Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus Christ came face to face with evil, took on the sin of the whole world, went with death all the way to the tomb, and came out the other side as winner, victor. In baptism, God gives us everything that is Christ's. This means that whenever and wherever we face evil, confront sin, or encounter death, like Martin Luther, we can respond, "I am baptized! You have no power over me. I belong to Christ, in whom I have been baptized." That is living the baptismal promises.

## Death and resurrection

Dying to sin and rising to new life are an integral part of baptism. In some places the one baptized is actually immersed in the water, acting out the drowning of the old person, the burial of the sinful self with Christ. From the water and word of baptism, a new person comes forth—reborn, recreated in Christ Jesus. Often, that new life is symbolized by a white baptismal garment, a reminder that those baptized are joined to Christ, clothed with Christ. The promise of God here is: Your sinful self will die, and you will have new birth.



*No matter how we feel  
about ourselves or what the  
circumstances of our life are,  
God's baptismal promises  
are true and lasting.*

Baptism happens only once, but the dying and rising happen again and again. Every time we confess our sin and receive God's forgiveness, we die to sin and rise to new life. Sometimes the dying is welcome—when we want to leave behind something that we have done or failed to do and when we want to bury the shame and guilt we feel as a result. Then we are eager for our old sinful self to die, and we are ready for a fresh start, a new beginning. At other times, though, the dying is hard—when we want to hold on to some pet sin, harbor some resentment or hatred, cling to some destructive behavior, or continue in some unredeemed way of living. Then we feel the pain. We resist. We struggle against God's unrelenting love that would put to death

all in us that is not of God so that we can live the resurrected life more fully.

In order to live our baptismal promises, something has to die. Especially when the dying of our sinful self is hard, we do well to remember that we are joined to Jesus Christ who knows something about death, who has gone there before us, and who still stands with us in the death that is a prelude to new birth.

## My beloved

We come out of the baptismal waters as God's adopted children. Perhaps you remember the story of Jesus' baptism. As Jesus came out of the water, a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased." In baptism, we are joined with Jesus so that God's promise to Jesus is the same promise to us: "You are my daughter. You are my son. You are my beloved. I am so pleased with you." Imagine what it is like to have God look on us with such love.

My niece Jennifer just finished her master's degree and will be married this spring. I remember the day she was baptized when she was just a few weeks old. I have a picture of my younger brother David, her father, holding her. It was late in the day, and we'd all taken our turn holding the baby. Finally David got to hold her. He just looked at her with such pleasure, delighting in her, wanting all the best for her. In that moment, I had a glimpse of what it must be for God to hold one of us, a beloved, precious child in whom God is so well pleased.

Sometimes it is hard to hang on to that baptismal identity as God's daughter or son. When we are down on ourselves, we might wonder how God could possibly love us or want to include us in the family. We might question God's promises when things go badly for us. Surely, we think, God would not allow this sort of thing to happen to a beloved daughter or son.

No matter how we feel about ourselves or what the circumstances of our life are, God's baptismal promises are true and lasting. In our baptismal rite, the newly

baptized is addressed by name with these words: "*Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.*" God loves us for Christ's sake and will not let us go.

## Companions on the journey

Baptism is not a solitary thing. It's not just between individuals and God. Baptism sets us always in the midst of the people of God, the body of Christ, the church. They are there welcoming us at our baptism and inviting us *into the mission we share . . . in giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God's creative and redeeming word to all the world.* They make promises, too, to nurture us in the faith, to pray for us and to show us how to live as Christians in the world.

In this way the body of Christ, the church, becomes our companion on the journey, sharing bread and wine with us at the communion table, speaking words of encouragement and challenge, helping us when we have need, and receiving the gifts that we bring.

Sometimes they rub us the wrong way and unintentionally (or even intentionally) sin against us, and we sin against them. Then we remember that we are baptized and so are they, all of us marked by the cross of Christ and living in the forgiveness of sins, each of us a beloved daughter or son of God—no matter what. And by living the promises of baptism, we can begin again.

It's clear that in baptism God is the primary promiser and the primary actor. God's people—that is, the congregation gathered and sometimes parents and sponsors—join in with their promises to help those baptized know more completely the heights and depths of God's mercy and love and to help them live more fully the new life in Christ.

Those who are being baptized are asked to make promises, too, *to profess (their) faith in Christ Jesus, reject sin, and confess the faith of the church.* Very often, though, they are too young to understand or to speak. Even when the candidates for baptism are older, the con-

gregation gathered is invited to speak the promises with them. These are things we help one another to do—*renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God . . . the powers of this world that rebel against God . . . the ways of sin that draw (us) from God.* We promise to turn away from those things and to turn to the Triune God who promises us so much.

In our baptismal service, the promise to turn to God takes the form of the Apostles' Creed. The word "creed" comes from the first word of that profession of faith in Latin—*credo*—I believe. At root, that Latin word means, "I give my heart." We promise to give our heart to God who in baptism says to us, "I give my heart to you. I believe in you." And we can never be the same again.

## A sign

Sometimes it is helpful to have some tangible symbol to remind us of the promises we make and the promises made to us. Friends exchange bracelets. Spouses wear wedding rings. A family portrait says that this adopted daughter is one of us. Every time we make the sign of the cross or touch the water in the baptismal font, we remember our baptismal promises. We might remember our baptism, too, every time we walk in the rain or take a shower or wash our face or light a candle. These things we can see and feel remind us to keep our baptismal promises, but even more they remind us of the promises God has made to us in baptism—promises that will not be broken.

*You belong to Christ,  
in whom you have been baptized.*

*Alleluia.* 🌿

**E. Louise Williams**, executive director emeritus of the Lutheran Deaconess Association, is president of DIAKONIA World Federation of Diaconal Associations and Communities and adjunct assistant professor of theology at Valparaiso University. She is a frequent speaker and retreat leader.

# GENEROUS STEWARDS GIVE NEARLY \$100,000

For seven years, Ala' Mohammed Othman Qneibi, 16, has gone to Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) three times a week for dialysis treatment. He takes a taxi from his small village home to Hebron where he boards the AVH/Lutheran World Federation bus that takes him to the hospital. Despite the time Alá spends traveling to the hospital, the 11<sup>th</sup> grader keeps up with his studies.

Without the services of Augusta Victoria Hospital, Palestinian children like Ala' living with cancer or kidney failure in the Holy Land would have nowhere to turn for treatment and would face almost certain death.

The Lutheran World Federation-run hospital in East Jerusalem serves all patients regardless of their religion, nationality, ethnic origin, or ability to pay. AVH is the only hospital available to Palestinians that cares for children with cancer or kidney failure.

And your generosity has made the hospital's job a little easier and given sick children hope.

Your gifts are also supporting a project to bring clean water to rural communities in Zimbabwe. Administered through ELCA World Hunger's Stand With Africa and the Lutheran World Federation, the project will offer Africans help with water conservation and irrigation as well as teach them such income-generating activities as fish farming.

All this good work is coming about through your contributions to the Women of the ELCA's 20th anniversary offering.

As this issue was being written, your gifts to Women of the ELCA's 20th anniversary offering had reached \$95,538, according to Linda Post Bushkofsky, executive director of Women of the ELCA. The offering is a response to two resolutions adopted at the Sixth Triennial Convention in 2005 addressing financial concerns at AVH and the effect of water shortages and

pollution on women and children worldwide.

Half the money raised through this offering will support the water project and the hospital. The other half will help fund the various ministries and programs of Women of the ELCA. A presentation of the gifts will be made at the Seventh Triennial Gathering in Salt Lake City, Utah.

## Congregational units making gifts of \$1,000 or more were:

- Brickerville United Lutheran Church, *Lititz, Pennsylvania*
- Faith Lutheran Church, *Calamus, Iowa*
- Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, *Burnsville, Minnesota*
- Trinity Lutheran Church, *Lansdale, Pennsylvania*
- St. Paul Lutheran Church, *Crookstone, Minnesota*
- Richland Lutheran Church, *Richland, Washington*
- First Lutheran Church, *Sioux Falls, South Dakota*
- Elim Lutheran Church, *Robbinsdale, Minnesota*

The nearly \$96,000 came in 614 gifts from 592 donors. Gifts from individuals ranged from \$2 to \$1,000.

These groups will be honored at the Triennial Gathering, said Post Bushkofsky.

"The women of this organization—individually and collectively—are generous stewards of the gifts entrusted to them by God," she said. "The anniversary offering is clear evidence of that. These gifts move the organization into its next 20 years while also supporting ministries held dear by the women of this church.

"I offer a hearty thanks," continued Post Bushkofsky, "to all who gave to the 20th anniversary offering." 🌿

## Synodical women's organizations making gifts of \$2,000 or more were:

- Virginia
- Montana
- Upstate New York
- South Carolina
- Sierra Pacific
- St. Paul Area



## RACE NOTES

# Take the initiative

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



## Everything old is new

again, or so the saying goes. Activities that we've been about for some time in Women of the ELCA are "old hat" to us but seem very new to others. For example, a few years ago small group ministries were all the rage. People grow in small groups, proponents claimed. We Lutheran women have known this for decades! Ever since Lutheran women began coming together—at least as far back as the 19th century—we've been meeting in circles. And what's a circle? A few believers coming together for study, prayer, fellowship, service—a small group.

Our church has embarked on a new initiative called "Book of Faith." This initiative invites the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith—the language of Scripture. Its primary purpose is to get people studying Scripture so that we might more fully live into our baptismal calls.

That's nothing new for Women of the ELCA. Women in our organization have years, even decades, of personal history in studying Scripture. Many women have come together month after month with the same group of women, gathered in Bible study, supported one another both on the faith journey and through the joys and trials of everyday living. I know women who have been gathering monthly for Bible study for 40 or even 50 years.

The commitment to regular Bible study knows no age limitations in Women

of the ELCA. Carmen Richards, the immediate past president of Women of the ELCA, tells about when she was a teenage newlywed invited to Bible study by her mother-in-law. When my husband's grandmother moved to a nursing home at the age of 90, her circle regularly came to the nursing home so they could all share in the Bible study together.

Women in our organization have much to share with the larger church about our Bible study experiences. We can tell of the transforming power of the Word when we come together with others month after month for study. We can describe the mutual support and encouragement that comes from companions who study the Word together. We know what it's like to live out our baptismal call, supported by the study of Scripture. Not only can we comment on our study of the Bible, we have opinions about different approaches to leading Bible study.

When people mention the Book of Faith, tell them about your own Bible study experiences. In fact, take the initiative and bring it up. Because the Book of Faith can take many creative forms, see if your congregational unit would host an event where participants identify a Bible passage or story and talk about how it relates to their lives. While you're at it, invite some women from your congregation to join in the upcoming study, "The Hidden Hand of God: Wisdom Stories from Ruth, Daniel, and Esther." 🌿

**Linda Post Bushkofsky** is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

## Draw Us In

by Catherine Malotky

### Draw us in, God. In

the dead of night, Jesus told Nicodemus he could not see the kingdom of God without being born from above. Nicodemus, filled with questions, pushed back, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”

Would Jesus have the same answer for us if we had asked? He told Nicodemus that he could not enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit (John 3:1–10).

In our tradition, we claim that in baptism we are born of water and Spirit. We are washed by water and word, and we come out new on the other side. When we have been so washed, the Spirit is indelibly written on our souls. It is our spiritual birth.

I am intrigued by Jesus’ choice of metaphor—to be born. I have no memory of my own birth, of course. And unlike my foremothers, who had their babies at home and were accompanied by friends through labor and beyond, I had never witnessed a birth when it was my turn to labor. The metaphor was not yet rich for me.

Now, however, I know much more, having twice brought a pregnancy to fruition. Now I have a broader sense, God, of what you are up to when you give birth to us in baptism.

God, you are familiar with us before we are baptized. We are yours nonetheless, being created, waiting in your womb of mercy. We are carried there, protected by your holy waters. You

nourish us through your very blood, giving of yourself that we might grow and live.

It is not an easy thing to give us birth. It costs you each time. Life and death are close at the time of birth, very close. Your holy water, in pregnancy a protector, at birth becomes the harbinger of our arrival. It bathes us that we might slip into the world more easily. You release us to the world, naming us your children and calling us to lives of service in your name.

Then we hear our siblings say, “We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share: join us in giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God’s creative and redeeming word to all the world” (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 231). Welcomed, we grow and become the ones you have made us to be.

When life is hard, and the sound of your voice is hard to discern, we may come to you as our brother Nicodemus did, yearning to see the kingdom of God. When we need to return to your womb of mercy, God, draw us in. Draw us in, regardless of age or stature, doubt or hope, strength or failing. Protect us, nourish us, love us. When we are again ready to respond to your calling, usher us once more into the life of the baptized, washed clean and renewed by your holy water. Amen. 🌿

**The Rev. Catherine Malotky** serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.



Photo: Jessica Stewart

E-mail a photo of your Bible study group to [LWT@elca.org](mailto:LWT@elca.org).

## BLESSED ARE THEY

Sue Wilcox (l-r), Linda Taylor, Joelle Buchan, Stephanie Colson, Evey Thomsen, and Sharon Cebrun finish lunch after a 2007 Bible study introduction event at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, San Clemente, California, where nearly 140 attended. This year the church's annual Bible study event is September 20. Martha Stortz, author of *Lutheran Woman Today's* 2007-2008 study on the Beatitudes, and Phyllis Anderson, president of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, California, are leading the program at Our Savior's. For more information, call Kelly Frohner at 949-361-2331 or e-mail her at [andrewsmom@prodigy.net](mailto:andrewsmom@prodigy.net).

Submitted by Kelly Frohner

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